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THE HUMAN DESIRE





Berenice

E HUMAN DESIRE

BY

VIOLET IRWIN

With a Frontispiece by
MRS MONTGOMERY P.A.[illegible]



BOSTON
[illegible] MAYNARD AND COMPANY
PUBLISHERS



THE HUMAN DESIRE

BY

VIOLET IRWIN

With a Frontispiece by

JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG



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THE HUMAN DESIRE



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I

A TEMPORARY EXIT OF THE HERO

"Then your sympathies are not with the woman?"

The question arose from Margaret le Hunt's look of mingled criticism and affection, as her glance followed her cousin's retreating figure. When one breaks away from a conversational group a personal remark is not uncommon, and if there hang about the individual that veiled mystery of a seemingly constitutional unhappiness, personality becomes irresistible. Her fingers tingling from Robert Lane's hearty clasp, and with memory kindled by girlhood's treasured association, the woman flung her answer generously in defence.

"I don't know! Naturally Bob is genial and charming. He has been driven into solitude; has given up everything and lives alone in the old house off Washington Square. I believe there is

a studio on the top floor, but nobody sees it, nobody goes there, even I am not invited and we were once great friends. It is not his fault — the trouble. And I am glad to meet him, even casually, like this!"

With other childish virtues Margaret had preserved the delightful quality of enthusiasm. Her warm-hearted nature roused to champion a former playmate, and the glow of real emotion shone in her eyes as it quickened her fervent speech. An enthusiast, she was herself likely to inspire admiration; tall, deep-chested and distinguished by that absolute perfection of style in simplicity which, covet it as we may, defies creation and remains a birthright. Physical energy, buoyant spirits and a vivid color flowing under an olive skin combined to throw her into high relief against the cross currents of anæmic citizens jostling each other on the pavement, under the canopy of a fashionable restaurant.

"I had thought of you always as his wife's friend."

Regret and doubt of herself brought a moment's pause. "I am fond of Helen. On the surface she is the most selfish person I have ever met — yet she touches me. The marriage was a bad mis-

take for her as well. You see I know them both too intimately to be a judge."

"Yes, you are a cousin of both, are you not; and all grew up in the same family? — I never heard the details of the divorce." While speaking Mr. Solomon kept his eyes on her animated face and, had the topic been less serious, one might have suspected him of making conversation, trying to put off the inevitable parting a minute or two longer.

"There isn't any story. It is a clear case of incompatibility; when the fire on the hearth is mated with an iceberg the outcome must be destruction to both elements. And being Romanist they are only separated, a miserable sort of arrangement."

"That is bad. How could they make such a mess of things? They should have known each other well. A case of the blind boy, I expect. Mrs. Lane is very handsome."

The man's words were now weighted with real interest and consideration.

Margaret shook her head. "My terrible old uncle arranged it. He has a genius for influencing wills. He made the boy believe himself in love, and Helen was always afraid of Uncle; years ago she was as much under his control as

she seems now to be under the influence of the Church."

"I know Bartholomew Lane, an autocrat of the old school, crafty, mesmeric, subtle — the Judge is not easily thwarted. And no doubt he was anxious to keep the money in the family — was the young man guileless?" Amusement overspread the listener's face, and Paul joined in the laugh against himself. "I admit the question had racial character. It is as difficult to free oneself from the earmarks of nationality and the superstitions of religion as it is to persuade a fair lady into giving up an afternoon's shopping."

"Impossible! Do you realize we sail Wednesday, and I have nothing ready?"

"Well, I'll see you Monday. Come early; you promised."

"And your promise?" Margaret's winsome smile flashed at him blotting out her serious mood as a white light blots out the darkness.

"I always give people a fair chance to lose their bets," he replied, shaking hands. And with pretty determination she cried out of the taxi window:

"But I am not going to lose!"

On the way from shop to shop the woman found time to recall her last little skirmish with

Mr. Solomon, as they had sat in the Ritz Carlton a few days before; a friendly war of words over the tea cups. The object of the discussion, a young man "with an English chin and clothes, and the air of being a great ass," as Margaret first described him, had seated himself at a nearby table, and was apparently quite unconscious of exciting any comment. Indeed, it was this concentrated disregard of his entire surrounding that had piqued Margaret's curiosity, and when she heard his name was Nott, the pun on personality moved her to real amusement and interest. Again and again her eyes had wandered in that direction.

A man above the ordinary height and built in proportion she had judged him. His features were regular in profile; very thick black hair and a small, light brown mustache presented the most striking traits from a distance. The face was not in itself peculiar, but a quality apart from appearance marked him out from others gathered in the room. Amidst the animation of color, light and sound he remained fixed and motionless — Sphinxlike! At the first glance Margaret had thought him lifeless. She looked again and his humanity had not asserted itself. As she continued to watch him his deadness grew uncanny. It fascinated her. The face expressed absolute

negation; the attitude wearisome; raising a cup to his lips was a personal protest of extreme lassitude. The young man seemed not only uninterested in his surroundings but oddly dissociated from them, as one who willed neither his coming nor his going, but waited in patient immobility, until the fashionable whim of time permitted and commanded him to leave.

Paul, who knew Jasper Nott slightly, spoke of him as very average and an obvious ass, but Margaret scented personality, and finally their spirited dispute resolved itself into a wager; Paul promising to invite the stranger to tea and let her see what she could make out of him.

Miss le Hunt looked forward to the Englishman's presence with anticipation that she told herself was absurd for her years; not dreaming she too had been marked. Nevertheless, without allowing a quiver of a muscle to betray him, Mr. Nott had taken a very lively interest in his neighbours, and had determined on an enterprise which would not have astonished them as much as it amazed himself. He had resolved to cultivate the acquaintance of a Jew, and that with no tardy reluctance but such awakening as almost prompted him the initiative. A card for Monday afternoon coming close upon the heels of this de-

cision greatly surprised him, but he accepted it as a largess of fortune, opportune if unexpected.

Paul Solomon had achieved more comfort and less responsibility in the contrivance of his comfort than falls to the lot of the average New Yorker. At one time his house overlooking the park had been the beloved rendezvous of artistic and literary circles. A generous hospitality had included all. Youngsters departing to discover a new universe in the old world were made happy by his introductions, and men and women eminent in their professions had thrilled over an invitation to dinner. For artists of international reputation, come to reap the rich harvest of American patronage, were counted nightly among his guests. Prima-donnas volunteered to sing for him; geniuses discussed golf and cricket over his old port; and exhibitors in the Salon made fantastic sketches of each other on his table linen.

Suddenly the host withdrew from it all. And while astonished stars were yet expressing their chagrin, the mansion was closed. In the world of fashion it is always difficult to account for a perfectly straightforward action, so busy tongues circulated reports, furnished reasons, and vied with one another in gossip, but none of them voiced the real motive, simply apparent. Mr. Solomon

was tired of people. He bought a house backing on the Babbington, built a dumb waiter connected with the kitchens of that most exclusive club, cut down his accommodations to six rooms, and limited his hospitality to the circle of his immediate friends.

About the time Paul discovered Margaret le Hunt he graduated from the immature folly of crowds, for he discovered also that parties of two score give less satisfaction than parties of two. And having made the discovery he rarely extended the number of his guests beyond that indiscreet limit.

The tea, however, being a farewell event, the invitations were increased, and Jasper Nott, in accordance with his newly conceived idea, was among those who presented themselves early at the door. As he followed the silent footed man upstairs, he could not help taking chances on how far his luck would serve him, and made a bet with a certain charitable institution that the 'Daughter of Pharoah,' as he had already named the unknown brunette, would not be there; laying the odds against his desire and so insuring an agreeable sensation either way.

At the entrance to the music room he waited, paying ready tribute to the sound of the piano,

and glancing over the audience made note with satisfaction of a recently acquired debt of five guineas to the Sacred Heart Orphanage. For opposite sat the object of his visit, in company with a youthful violinist, under the power of whose bow, only the night before, a vast company had been swept on from tears to a demonstration of great joy. His face now wore that strange look of detachment common to the faces of musicians who listen.

Possessing a keenly sensitive ear, and having heard that Solomon 'played,' Nott had come in a mood of doubtful expectation, but he received the impression of it all with real delight. And Margaret noticed his expression lost its set reserve under the spell of sound.

She was disappointed in the full face, thinking it rather ugly and certainly very crooked; a monocle face with the corner of one eye drawn down and the mouth mounting to meet it. He was not as tall as she imagined; and when off guard, a muscular strength of shoulder and leanness of thigh went far to contradict his indolence. Although again groomed and dressed with the perfection of a beau, he seemed more human and less interesting than on the former occasion. But soon her curiosity was stirred anew for with silence and

the consequent motion in the room, as at a signal, he dropped instantly to the cat-like lassitude of his earlier manner.

Margaret laughed to herself at having detected a first class poseur, half agreeing with Paul's exposition 'obvious ass.' And shortly, through the intervention of the host, she found herself tête-a-tête with Mr. Nott.

"This is a pleasure I have been hoping for. I saw you at tea with Mr. Solomon last week."

She leaned back, looked quizzically across her cup and startled him with her first remark, so fearlessly, unconventionally frank.

"And I saw you; that is why you are here."

He should have known it bowled him out at the start, and might have jumped for safety to another topic, but a delicate self appreciation was one of his phases. Blaming himself for the obvious he replied. "I am flattered."

The woman only narrowed her eyes slightly and continued in an even voice, "I wondered if you look a greater bore than you are."

"Or vice versa?"

"Impossible alternative!" The murmured answer was next thing to a dismissal, and it did not need the stab of disappointment in her glance to impress on him his own banality. Margaret

was surprised to see a sudden humor leap from his eyes to the corners of his mouth as he turned to her crying,

"You score! I'm always ready to admit it when I am beaten at my own game — but I played badly."

"I thought you saw it from the first and were too British to run away."

"That is generous, but I must confess I did not. It is an afternoon of surprises. I had no idea our host played so well."

By the end of the sentence his voice had reached a drawl, and again his face expressed complete negation.

Margaret, oddly fascinated by the glimpse of the real man she had just seen, determined to unmask him no matter how reluctant he might be, and with attention concentrated she answered carelessly. "You have used the right word. Mr. Solomon is a musician and a gambler. — He has laid a bet of five hundred to one that I find you the Gordian Knot that has to be cut."

For one tense moment the silence lasted while the man struggled with his emotions. His face seemed to harden into iron so great was the effort for control. Then his whole pose broke down and he gave himself up to laughter that ran sponta-

neously from eddy to eddy of mirth; dying down, and rising, and breaking out in unexpected places, till Margaret gave up conversation and laughed too. Had the woman known there was more than amusement in his hilarity, for Jasper Nott fully realized he had met his equal, a conscious humor in the other sex, and congratulated himself on the fact.

There was no attempt to resume his disguise; instead Miss le Hunt made acquaintance with a wide awake intelligence which had lain for years ambushed behind that stoical mask. Observant as well as observed, Nott allowed his mind to play hide and seek with its moods, ironically giving to the world a caricature of the shams which its own fashion and whims ordained; the inspiration of the bluff he so persistently carried out, having sprung, as he explained, from his name.

"In this country those who intend to be somebody must do something. 'I am' commands here, but 'I am not' is the fetish of England. All society, you know, is very much like a boy at a circus; it observes and worships. The closer the thing observed approaches the thing it would like but dare not do the greater the worship. Americans amuse their spectators by extraordinary exertion. It is the man on the trapeze. The startling, the newly

grotesque, or absurdly inappropriate is a phase of their social neurotics. You are nationally still young enough to enjoy fireworks, eager enough to strive, willing to pay tuppence ha' penny for your penny whistle. We older cousins, in ennui perhaps, have set a standard less exacting. Our established good form occasions no effort; we are not brilliant and the ruling is that brilliance shall not score."

"Then you admit English society is dull?"

"Deadly dull! Have you ever supped in Paris and in London on successive nights? But do not forget England prides herself on being dull. We like it. A substantial gloom appeals to us more than the evanescent gaiety of Montmartre or the Boulevard des Capucins." He paused, then with a movement as though to free his mind of some leash of recollection continued. "Personally I only exaggerate the form of my countrymen."

This unexpected, almost feminine introduction of his own individuality amused Margaret, and provoked the comment. "Do you make inertia a serious occupation?"

"It is a highroad to distinction," he replied, whimsically adding, "and not an easy game. Every emotion must be curbed, every muscle controlled, every mood anticipated. I shall never

perfect it; my sense of humor traps me as it did today. I saw that you saw through me from the first, but I did not want to give in."

"Well, are you glad you gave in and enjoyed yourself? Do you not sometimes find your pose — in the way?"

"Most annoyingly so! When I cannot stand the strain I go to the mountains. It does not do to give in too often before a gossiping community. I am afraid, for instance, I shall never be able to re-establish myself in your mind as a complete bore."

"Oh, I'm not sure about that." Margaret replied to his serio-comic manner, and at once, the lightning flash of a smile ran over his features, from eyes to mouth.

"Shame, to strike after you have disarmed your man! At least give me a chance to prove my fear. If you care for the Whistler Exhibition may I send you cards?"

"I have them already, thank you, but I shall not be here for the opening. We are sailing on Wednesday to Naples."

"Even better than Whistler. Are you going by the 'Carthusian' and may I enquire about the 'we'?"

"I am sailing with my cousin Mrs. Lane —

across there, looking at the intaglios. Have you seen them?" She motioned toward the far room where, before the windows, rows upon rows of cut jewels hung to intercept the daylight. "They are really splendid, and I assure you Mr. Solomon is not merely a purchasing collector; he knows for himself all there is to know on the subject."

"He is a very clever man, and wonderful at the piano. What color! We forget the Jew is an Oriental, but their playing is full of the violent beauty of hot countries."

"The beloved south to which I am going — still I am sorry to miss Whistler. They are showing 'The Chintz Room', a tour de force."

He took the hand she offered saying with conviction, "You go to better things. — To the Frampanii Madonna?"

But Margaret was frankly puzzled. "I am afraid I must confess that I have never even heard of it."

"And I may only hear of it. The order to which the sculpture belongs is very strictly cloistered, and my sex prohibits me from seeing what I believe is an extraordinary achievement; second only to the Michel Agnolo 'Piata' of the Vatican."

"But you must tell me all about this! What

is it, where is it? Why do we not hear of it?"

"You are hearing about it now — though so little. I only know it is a marvellous Madonna in marble erected in memory of one of the Frampanii family. The cloister is preposterously out of the way, but I can send you directions if you would care to investigate."

"Please do," she besought. "The report must be exaggerated or it would be advertised."

"Starred in Baedeker! Well, go and see; and I hope you will be able to tell me of one shrine sacred from the tripper."

"I did not realize you were so much one of us — in spite of Whistler."

With the words Margaret felt a shock of consternation, for while she spoke the man to whom she spoke ceased to exist. An instantaneous change; all she could detect was the quick drooping of a pair of heavily lashed eyelids; behind this screen expression fled from his face. He became inanimate, his manner and attitude artificial and consciously graceful. Instead of the intelligent, gaily companionable dilettante of the last half hour, she was confronted by a self-satisfaction that certainly deserved to be cut. Disconcerted and provoked she turned quickly away, to be convulsed with silent laughter, for not a half dozen

paces beyond and coming rapidly toward them were their host and Helen Lane. The idea of her cousin in juxtaposition to Mr. Nott struck a reverberating chord on her sense of the ridiculous; and finding herself on the inside of the game, she realized at once how amusing it must be.

The urbanity of the situation was fortunately saved by abridgment, but Margaret found opportunity to whisper to Paul, "Perfectly fascinating." And she was diverted equally by his look of astonishment, and by Helen's remark as she took her place in the brougham.

"Odious man."

"Who?"

"That English dude!" Margaret's companion wasted no more words on Jasper Nott, those being sufficient, in her opinion, to express him completely till the end of time. Helen was as quick in forming her judgments as she was in stating them; they never altered, and were often singularly wrong.

Before the end of the week Mr. Solomon received a marconi-gram varying greatly from ordinary communications to Wall Street. It was an idle message sent to fill an idle moment on the sea; first a few terse words of favorable conditions; a lengthy reference to a new development

in an old joke, so like Margaret, and the news "Jasper Nott on board."

Amazed and chagrined at this unexpected explanation of Nott's sudden disappearance, Paul secretly admired the man who had left everything and circled half the world at three days' notice, for the chance of furthering his acquaintance with a woman like Margaret le Hunt. He wondered why he had not also sailed on the Carthusian, instead of arranging to meet the ladies later in Paris. Business, business! That was the answer. Glancing at the pile of papers on his desk he felt the slavery of his millions, for a moment envying the other who had enough, and time to enjoy it. Then with a despatch entirely characteristic he wrote and sent off his reply, suitably invoking the god of ridicule; and became once more immersed in the conservation of wealth.

Margaret reading the words a little later in the day, thought them also very characteristic.

"Your value is steadily declining on the New York Exchange," she said to her English friend as she handed him the message: "In consideration of latest intelligence will make the odds one thousand."

II

A QUESTION OF VOCATION

"What a lot of walls there are in Italy."

Margaret le Hunt sighed toward the end of a four hours' drive, the only means of arriving at the Convent of Santa Maria dei Miricoli, and the Frampanii Madonna. She was not thinking of the grey stone boundaries of the old road, winding in and out and up and down over the never ending hills, but of class and caste, of custom and convention; the official walls built straight with form and ceremonies, and the high enclosing strength of prejudice, superstition, faith and creeds; prison walls garlanded with roses and decked out with candles. But her companion replied to the material aspect:

"I think it is a relief to see them again. We have been through enough barren country. The cloister must be a queer, remote place! This road is unthinkable in civilization."

Although Helen groaned as the carriage gave a jolt, she did not complain. Her comfort,

always a question of great moment in their plans, was sacrificed willingly when the object of the journey had any connection with the Church. And in arranging this expedition, on which her heart was set, Margaret very wisely dwelt on the sacred rather than the secular interest, and had quite suppressed the fact of Mr. Nott's enthusiasm, for her cousin could not bear the Englishman, who, on his side, had taken a perverse delight, throughout the voyage, in misleading Mrs. Lane; greeting her infallibly with an assumed, bored immobility of face, till Margaret between the two was put to great straits to conceal her amusement.

In the semi-confidential seclusion of two deck chairs it is possible to lay, in a very short time, the foundations of a real friendship; and this Margaret and Jasper had attained when they reached Naples, though no hint of any further interest was apparent on either side. During their long conversations both had kept clear of sentiment. Jasper seeking only to entertain had succeeded splendidly, for which he received the full meed of generous appreciation. Margaret delighted in his talk, his odds and ends of literary gossip, introduced with other matter of much inconsequence, and with strange little personal

experiences arising from his indiscreet tendency to see the thing out. The man's pose also placed them together in a sort of mild conspiracy by arousing the expressed disapproval of the other passengers and steady opposition from Helen.

Miss le Hunt realized her new friend was looked upon generally as an idler, an habitué of fashionable clubs, whose whimsical thoughts and actions brought him not infrequently before the tribunal of social criticism. But before the end of the voyage she had made up her own mind about this peculiar personality, and very much regretted the misunderstanding between her cousin and Mr. Nott. She felt sure the latter would have joined them on their southern travel if invited, and was surprised to find how much she missed his companionship, and how often the thought of what Jasper would have said to this or that sprang to her mind.

The carriage rolled on at a steady pace between the two grey walls crowned with straw hatted vineyards and hanging harvests of golden fruit, till, on the right, the immense gates of the convent reared their arch out of the expressionless stone facing. But it was only when they stood within the court, on three sides of which rises the unbroken masonry of the cloister, resolutely turning

its back on even so little of the world as might enter there, that Margaret realized the strength and meaning of these walls. Substantially the place they entered was a prison, a soul prison from which the only exit must be upwards where the golden cross blazes against the blazing sky. She was profoundly impressed by the spiritual signification; the next moment her mood rushed on again to an appreciation of material beauty, for the visitors were directed to a passage cut tunnel-wise through the very heart of the building, and as they advanced the far end, glowing like a kindled fire, melted into clear light, a limpid, sparkling sunshine, gilding their entrance to the garden. The vision burst upon them and they stopped dead still. A Midas wealth of beauty was flung at their feet as sudden, overpowering, stupendous as to an "Open Sesame!"

Formal paths and cultivated borders lent dignity to Nature; they curbed but could not lessen nor conceal her riotous plenty. Like a modest woman who goes full bosomed and broad hipped behind her veil, the place was redolent with promise of fruition. Colour flaunted and flouted colour from bed to bed, and the pergolas hung heavy with clustered mauve and pink and scarlet. In the welcome shade of one of these the two

ladies walked to the brow of the hill, from where they could see the several terraces dropping in easy stages to the level of the ocean. Through the bright stillness of noon-day they heard, from the beach far below, the little voices of little waves; and turning looked back on the façade of the convent, built formidably in the early Italian style. A great wall ran down from it on each side of the garden out into the sea, as though to gather and bind this splendid bouquet of nature, and hold it to the bosom of the earth.

"Eden must have been like this!" Margaret cried, returning from a tour of the flights of wide low steps and open terraces, to the welcome coolness of the pergola, where she found Helen sitting just as she had left her, lost in enjoyment.

"It certainly is hot; and it's a great climb!" gasped the more active explorer, fanning herself. "But the terraces are lovely from below."

Her cousin made no answer at once; when it came it was a surprise.

"What it must be to dwell amid such beauty and such peace." On the passive face there seemed to have fallen a spiritual, calm aloofness. The eyes expressed the mood as plainly as her words, and presently Margaret answered:

"I don't find the garden as you do full of holy

calm. I don't feel it that way. I cannot, although I have been sitting here trying to for the last five minutes. To me it is pulsing with life. It is full of natural primitive force; the glory of life and its possibilities — Creation! Creative force — that is it! Every bush and flower cries it aloud. When the birds sing I am sure they sing it. The air is vibrating with it. The sun and winds are dancing a tarantella to life — and oh, I could sing here and dance too! This place is made for laughter and love!"

But Helen's eyes turned steadily to the cloister with its narrow windows and bulky stone arches; and to the chapel rising on the right, in an unadorned simplicity of harshness.

"Is not creation less than the Creator?" She almost intoned the question, making it a chanted worship. The thought and expression were in harmony with the beautiful face now lifted toward the golden cross.

The other woman felt a twinge of misgiving. She had judged Helen, secretly pitying her failure in the essential adjustments of every day life; and now an uncomfortable sense of miscalculation, falsified conviction, leaving the judge with a guilty consciousness of having looked down on her cousin; having placed her on a plane of limi-

tations, and counted her below value. Could it be Helen was above them all? Did her unfitness for the daily task and common need spring from some higher comprehension? — "Is not creation less than the Creator?" That sounded well, but Margaret's mind wanted to grapple with the thing, to argue it, to chase forth from hiding an elusive quality of real or unreal value which ambushed therein.

"Is not creation less than the Creator?" Were then these holy women more excellent than the wives and mothers of the world? Swift as inspiration the thought flashed to her mind: why had not Helen been a nun? She could picture the unemotional woman, saint-like in flowing robes, ministering before the altar; or moving in slow procession, chanting; or even as Mother Superior full of pious dignity, as judge, counsellor, autocrat, neither harsh nor indulgent. She saw Helen complete, happy, and in place, and generously forgave her all the shortcomings made so apparent by her yoking with the world. Not that Margaret felt any less, but rather more sorry for her cousin, Robert Lane. "It is unfortunate for a man to have married a nun," she mused whimsically. "And impossible for Robert, artist though he is, to wring humanity out of a Fra Angelico decora-

tive angel." Almost tenderly she slipped her arm into Helen's saying, "Let us go and see the church."

The entrance to the chapel led through a little cloister having a simple arrangement of white pillared arches on its four sides. The pavement was worn and uneven, and an old well, now disused, centered the flagstones in the middle of the square. Helen would have crossed directly, but Margaret detained her by a pressure of the arm.

"Wait! The chapel is horrid and cheap, I'm sure. They all are. But this is delicate and lovely." As she spoke her fingers tightened. "It is the last touch!" she whispered.

Across one corner of the court, where light and shadow with incisive compliment made vivid the beauty of the architectural forms, limning them crisply with sunlight on dark spaces, a nun passed in and out, a slight figure in the grey habit of the order, with averted face and arms piled high with blossoms, sumptuous offering, in the gathering of which a less rich garden must have been despoiled. For a moment only the little figure remained completing the charm and sanctity of the gracious old world place; then she was gone into the chapel, and the others followed.

While Helen knelt devoutly by each shrine,

Margaret watched the young sister arranging her flowers before God; turning into a fair and seemly tabernacle the tawdry altar, with its cheap vases, and trumpery relics so familiar in small Italian churches. When the last touch was given and a prayer said, she gathered up the remainder of her gift, and passed with a quick, eager grace behind one of the large pillars supporting the roof. Margaret detected something strongly alive in the movements in spite of her office. Under the nun's robes must be a vigorous body, she fancied; commenting to herself, "New to it; and a child, anyway, how could she be nun-like?"

Mentally she put her companion in the place of the little saint, and in her garments. She saw a glorified Helen before the altar, with her pure, passionless face and sedate movements, happy in the everlasting, unalterable service of her God. And looking about for her in the flesh, found that she bowed before yet another shrine, absorbed in prayer.

The uncanonic traveller in Margaret sighed, feeling even worship might be selfish. They had passed a long, hot, tiring morning and she was weary. Her feet cried out to be relieved of their burden, and the inner man longed for refreshment.

But, of course, Helen must not be disturbed at her devotions.

All at once she remembered the Madonna — Jasper Nott's Madonna! Her object; the raison d'être of all this patient driving. Amid the beauties of the garden and the strangeness of her thoughts, the Frampanii Madonna had entirely escaped her mind. Going hastily forward beyond the pillar, intending to ask the young nun, she came suddenly upon the two. It was to be a day of vivid emotions. Helen in the pergola had touched her to wondering amazement, and here was a vision which moved in sympathy the very depths of her artistic soul, striking its admiration broad awake.

Against the wide spandrel of a low arched tomb stood the marble madonna, undoubtedly a work of great value and beauty, not only in its simplicity of line, but in the expression of tender piety illuminating the face. The artist, seeking to express the link between humanity and the divine love, had made the child no Christ Child, poised precariously with uplifted fingers ready to receive homage and a tinsel offering, but a real babe, in its mother's arms, asleep, turned a little toward her as though repletion and a memory of the breast wrought happy dreams.

Margaret gazed and gazed at the face of the mother. Here was no canticle saint, but rather one who had known the sorrows of a great people, had borne them in a great heart, and had been greatly tried and not found wanting. It was a careworn, beautiful face from which hope shone like a resurrection. The eyes bent upon the Child seemed from beneath their lowered lids, to shed a radiance of mercy and of love powerful to cherish and to protect not alone the Babe, but every worshipper of the Babe, and those who in extremity might claim her intercession.

Tall lilies freshly placed were all about the sculpture; and in a pool of varicoloured light that slanted through the rich glass of a high window, knelt the little devotee. Her head was thrown up, and the grey hood of the order slipped back revealing the face, a child's face, vivid, eager, and unchastened, which, with its cropped head and ruddy cheeks, seemed more fit for a robust schoolboy than for the cloister of Santa Maria.

But there was more than buoyant youth in her rapt look bent upon the Virgin. It might have been a knight of the Holy Grail, or a knight keeping a first vigil, who knelt so, or a young monk in religious rhapsody. Yet Margaret saw at once it was not prayer. No beads hung from the slim

fingers; the lips did not move. The face upturned expressed reverence and awe and many other things. Such yearning, wistful, hunger was in it that Margaret's heart beat with pity like a quivering reed.

"Poor child, poor little lonely child!" she thought; and would have liked to go and put her arms about the young religieuse, and with warm kisses on her parted lips have answered the longing in her eyes. For plainly starvation of the affections cried from her face; what the soul needed was a hearty human love.

Margaret felt herself so drawn to her that she could not help moving impulsively forward, and the girl rose quickly.

"You are fond of the Madonna?"

"Si, Signora — She is worth all the rest!" Adding, as though in apologetic explanation: "Is she not mother of God?"

"You are right. She is worth far more than all the rest; they are not very beautiful."

"Ah, Signora, she is so lovely! And they are so happy, the Madonna and the little Bambino.— I bring lilies for them every day. Are they not beautiful too, Signora?"

Margaret glanced from the young face, so inno-

cent and sweet, to the tall white lilies, and back again to the pure face.

"Everything is beautiful here." She felt it true. "And you think they are happy together?"

"Si, Signora, the Virgin must be happy with the little Bambino, holding it so." She curved her arms as though to cradle a child.

Margaret smiled. "Yes, it is a cuddly baby, a chubby darling any one might love." She used the English diminutives and the Italian shook her head, not understanding.

"Did you ever see a real bambino, Signora?" The question was asked as one would speak of a great, almost impossible event.

Margaret could not refrain from laughing, low surreptitious laughter, remembering the church. "Dozens of them, child. Have you?"

But the girl remained perfectly serious. "Once, just once. And I held it in my arms so —." Again she made the cradle. "It was wonderful, Signora. I was so happy!"

"You liked the baby? Where did you see it?"

"When I used to go with Sister Clotilde to carry food to a poor vine dresser. One day they brought a bambino in. It was such a little, little thing, and I had never seen it before. I did not want to give it up. I cried. That was evil of me.

The Mother said it was evil; and now Sister Clotilde will never take me outside again. Ah, Signora! It made me so happy! It was so sweet to hold, so warm and soft — and the little hands of it, and its little shut eyes! Such happiness!" She paused a moment in wistful remembrance, then added parrot-like, "Perfect happiness is not for us in this world. Is it, Signora?"

Margaret, astonished, silenced, was at a loss for a reply, but finally admitted —

"We are seldom perfectly happy; perhaps it is impossible."

"Oh, Signora, I know if I could have a bambino — always — always, just for my very own, I would be perfectly happy!"

Pity swamped the last vestige of Margaret's amazement, for the natural womanly desire grew tragic in a heart beating beneath that grey habit.

"Child, child! Are you not happy in your garden? Have you been here long?"

"I have been here always. I lived always in the cloister before I was old enough to take vows. Some day I will be a real nun like the other sisters."

"Be content in your garden, little one. It is a fair place, much nicer than the world outside its walls."

"I know, Signora. I love the garden. It is full of pretty things; flowers and color and scent. So different from the chapel! Here it is all cold — except for the Madonna and the little fires on the altars there is no beauty or life or love here."

"Is there love in the garden?" Margaret asked, wondering what the girl's conception of love might be.

"But, yes, there are so many live things there, and life is love! They have little nests, and little, little live things, and I watch them. It is all charming."

Margaret shook her head sadly, gazing at the child-woman, so animated, so full of eager interest, so much kin to the live things in her garden. Here was another human soul which, missing direction at the cross roads, must go always emptily between prison walls. She looked about at the church with its strong masonry, its banners, its candles and its flowers.— Yes, a prison! Garlanded with roses — but a prison. And no way out for the lonely heart of the little sister till finally upward by the golden cross.

She felt a timid touch on her arm and heard the soft, foreign language.

"Are there many bambinos in the world, Signora? You said you had seen dozens. A dozen is

twelve, like the candles we burn on saint-days. That is a great many."

"My child, there are very, very many bambinos in the world, and some of them are not happy like the little bambino here. Some of them have no mothers and no homes, and are cold and hungry and die; in America, where I come from, they die of the cold and of the heat too. The world is not a kind place to little bambinos."

Had Margaret noticed the girl's face she would not have spoken so. It expressed shocked incredulity; the eyes wide with horror and aghast dismay.

"No mothers!" she cried. "Little bambinos without mothers; and cold, and hungry! Signora, Signora, we must have them here and feed them! Sometimes it is cold in the stone corridors — but we always have food."

"You could not have them all here. And you must not think about them,— about what I said. There are many happy children too."

"But the hungry ones! Yes, we could have them all! All the little children in the world!" She threw her arms wide in a magnificent gesture. "It is very large, the cloister; there are many, many empty rooms. It was once a great order!

We can have them all here.— Where are the bambinos, Signora? We must find them!"

"You would not have to look for them. If only you would open your doors and let the children come to you." For a moment the girl's enthusiasm swept the woman of the world along with it, but the next she shook her head. "It is a dream too good to come true. The nuns would never do it. They are too selfish and too snug — I beg your pardon! — I forgot. You do not seem like one of them."

Margaret laid her hand impulsively on the arm of the novice and felt her draw back from even so slight a physical expression of emotion. And Helen joining them at the moment, the two who had spoken so freely stood apart as strangers. It seemed a pretty shyness on the young sister's part, but Helen made her feel as though she were in the presence of the Mother Superior.

The other saw her shrink back from the unbroken ground of intense, expectant womanhood, to the neutrality of the Church, with mixed feelings of anger and relief. That one so early destined for the vocation would ever know a life beyond her garden was an unlikely alternative, perhaps to be feared. Yet what pity and what waste! Margaret, a Protestant with far reaching

sympathies and a big heart in touch with four continents, had a profound respect for the charitable sisterhoods, working each in its measure for the good of all, but no tolerance of lives given up to useless fasting through unprofitable years, while a swarming, ill begotten, populous world groaned and travailed in hourly need of practical help.

The visitors were made welcome to the convent. They were given refreshment and allowed to rest. And they were shown through the ancient buildings with grave courtesy, and bidden God-speed by the Mother Superior herself, when they drove away in the cool of the afternoon, neither of them able to understand what an epoch their visit had made in the lives of these cloistered women; nor dreaming what seed had been sown by Margaret's words in the mind of the young novice, Berenice.

III

GOD IN THE STORM

Little children cold and hungry. Little children dying of heat! Bambinos motherless! The idea would not leave Berenice, the horror haunted her day and night. What a dreadful place the world must be — that America where the strange lady lived! Yet even with the thought came curiosity concerning the world, curiosity about life and the longing for knowledge. She wondered how far away the place was, and reasoned it could not be very far since the two ladies had come in a carriage.

From Margaret's personality as much as in the short conversation with her, the little novice had received an entirely new impression of life and the world, the idea of a different scheme of things, a new standard of beauty and interest. The face and manner and clothes of the stranger, while foreign, were infinitely attractive to this very human heart. Berenice had never dreamed of such possibilities, and now with kindled imagination

she could think of nothing else. She still walked in her garden, she looked about and saw and understood the loveliness of its endless change; but she no longer lived in it. From the hour of revelation life, life, life and the world, the beautiful enthralling world outside, called incessantly to her desire. She did not realize the meaning of her preoccupation and yearning, but for the first time felt caged, shut away, purposeless.

Out of the vortex of these mixed emotions pity was at first the most insistent. It was terrible to think of those hungry children and she with plenty to eat. While the little sister sat at the long table with her simple meal before her she thought of the bambinos. When she knelt before the Madonna she prayed for them. When she lay in the little white bed in the cell-like room she called her own, her sorrow for the cold, motherless children kept her awake, and troubled her sleep with fitful dreams.

Berenice felt she must do something for them. But where was she to find them; where was America? She wanted to know all about these things, and the thoughts which took new shapes and strange importance in her awakening mind; and she waited her chance to ask. The nuns were not kind about answering questions, and she found it

difficult to approach the Mother Superior. At last, however, a possible moment came, and the question popped out without introduction, like a jack out of a box.

"Where is America, please?"

"Why do you want to know such things, child? You should be reading your breviary instead of asking idle questions." But the keen disappointment of the young face caused the wise woman to relent, after the reproof she added, "It is across the sea."

With such meager information Sister Berenice had to be content. Yet the germ of what she wanted was there. If America was on the other side of the ocean the children could not come of themselves; they must be brought in a boat. And who was to bring them?

Berenice knew certainly if anyone came with a child to the door they would not be turned away; for had she not come so, a child to them herself, and they had cared for her. Possibly she was one of the motherless bambinos. The idea of what she had been and how she had come to the convent had never entered her mind before. But from that time she began to think and wonder about it all, searching her brain for half forgotten memories, till the curiosity about life and the

immediate need of understanding, quite overcame her. Knowing nothing she now felt the desire for knowledge, but the nuns would give her no satisfaction. The girl asked several of them in vain, and even voiced a timid question to Father Nicolo. He too put her off. They seemed banded together against her, and in despair she once more forced her courage to address the Mother Superior. So cold was the reply this time, her reproof so severe, and the task set in penance for her idleness of mind, so very, very long and arduous, poor little Berenice felt she must have committed a great sin in trying to find out anything of the past.

But the youthful sister did not cease to think continually of the children in America, wondering who would come to bring them to the convent. As she raced about the garden in exuberant spirits she began to question if she could not go for them herself? Would it not be like going on a pilgrimage? She dared not ask, and so reconciled herself to waiting, but the thought was a live issue growing in her mind.

The novice saw herself coming back from such a pilgrimage to America, in a tattered robe, with a staff in her hand, standing knocking at the barred gate of the convent, with all the little chil-

dren of the world around her. The strange lady had vouched for dozens; so Berenice imagined a great crowd of children who would quite fill the small court as they came in. Her conception of the undertaking and its fulfilment was largely drawn from the pictures in an old copy of the lives of the saints, and it enthralled her mind and soul.

Sister Berenice determined on her pilgrimage and waited, and to one who is ready, opportunity is almost certain to come. In the same week a terrible storm broke over the south coast. The force of it and the attendant darkness are still spoken of among the people, so that the temporal disaster has become to them a date from which events are reckoned.

For three days the tempest beat out its violence against the convent walls, like some demoniacal thing; and trampled in the garden an enraged Pan drunken for self destruction, howling his curses and laughing his wanton villainies in derisive contest against the sound of chapel bells. It gathered the sea for a weapon and flung the mass of water furiously upon the shore, so that the terraces fell one from another, and huge stones were washed hither and thither, a grinding angry mass

working destruction; and the whole place was laid waste.

The nuns barred their narrow windows against the storm, and spent the time in prayer. Earnestly they prayed for those upon the sea, devoutly for such as were in peril, and apprehensively for their own safety when the foundations of the chapel shook. They watched a ship drive past, hard in to shore, where no ship sailed by choice. And, later, when they heard the booming of her signals, and knew that she had gone to pieces on the rocks, the holy women prayed again for the souls of those on board.

Sister Berenice prayed with the others and was much afraid. Their suspense and the solemnity of continual service wrought upon the girl's sensitive imagination, adding to physical alarm, the terror of a guilty conscience. For in the noises of the storm she heard a voice calling, "Open!" And the perpetual hammering of waves and rain seemed like hands knocking upon their closed doors clamouring for admission — admission for the naked, starving, helpless bambinos. It was to her as though, the patience of God suddenly at an end, the mighty forces of nature combined to plead the cause of the little children of the world.

"It is a message from Heaven commanding us

to open," became the fixed idea in her mind. And on the night of panic the child-nun made a vow concerning it: her first intelligent, voluntary pledge.

On the third evening the wind began to drop, and the morning after broke full of light, and still, save for the running of a heavy swell. The heart of Berenice turned heavy as she counted the wreckage in her beloved places. She did not know the face of her garden, all strange in devastation. Her flowers lay beaten to earth, or worse, uprooted, and cast upon the pathways as the wooden pergolas had been flung in heaps about the lawns. All the little nests she loved were demolished and their little tenants dead. She wept to see young birds, featherless and grotesque, lying rain-sodden on the bare earth.

"It is a judgment," her gentle spirit prompted, both conscience and heart suffering as she buried them tenderly beneath a cypress tree. "A judgment because we did not open to the children of the world."

Her sad task finished, Berenice turned away quickly and went to the pergola overlooking the sea. From its desolation a new world greeted her astonished gaze. This scene was the absolute antithesis of the old formal tracery of paths and steps

and fountains in gracefully artificial combination; for the coast had shaken out the folds of her mantle and rearranged herself to a new aspect. Below, upon what had been a beach, the ocean rose and fell in even sobs as though contrition moved her for her sins; and the two rampart walls of the convent garden, which had extended their protecting arms right out into the sea, were breached and their many stones strewn up and down the shore.

Berenice climbed down quickly to the water's edge. The world was thrown grandly open to her and she accepted the gift. In fact the girl hardly realized passing the convent boundary so full she was of enterprise. The sandy bay beyond was easy going, but the point gave her a difficult climb, and weary of impeded progress, she was glad to see the shining crescent of another bay. Here, too, a new interest arrested her, for various things were strewn on the beach; casks, and strangely shaped pieces of wood, and odd wreckage.

The explorer investigated these as light heartedly as a school boy might play at pirates on his native shore. Not until she came suddenly on a dark object lying beyond the farther point, did she realize their ghastly import. The body lay so still it must be dead! She knew it that of a man which

had been washed ashore from the wrecked ship. It lay half on the side, below a rock, and the arms were flung above the head in a despairful attitude.

The little novice crept up and peered at the face. It was young. A short, black moustache increased its pallor. The features were regular and pleasing, the eyes closed as in sleep, and the whole attractive.

Berenice had never seen any other man than Mario, the vine dresser, who had a coarse skin, a great beard, and was very ugly; and Father Nicolo who came to administer the sacraments — but he was not the same. For a long, long time she gazed at the dead face, tears coursing down her cheeks. She felt terribly sorry for this young man who looked so much as though he should have lived. Strangely, little Berenice felt for this victim of the sea the same pity that Margaret, the woman of the world, had felt for her, the recluse, a few days earlier, — and more. His body made her think of the poor, pitiful birds she had found in the path, bleached and wet and cold. Then she remembered the soul of the dead and knelt to pray for it; and when she had finished the prayer she sat beside him, thinking.

This ship must have come from America — from across the sea. Had there been any little

children on it, and were they drowned too. If she went farther up the shore would she find them on the beach? In the raging of the tempest she had solemnly pledged herself to her pilgrimage; should she start upon it now — at once? Alas! It was high noon, and she was hungry. Beside, she would be missed; already the convent bell sounded its summons. The girl hesitated, sighed, took a last look at the dead face, and hurriedly retraced her steps.

But she did not forget. Her splendidly vivid imagination had been greatly excited by the incidents of the past two weeks, the most momentous, indeed, the only incidents worth reckoning, of all her life. And their effect was heightened by the prohibition of her recent punishment. Fear of reproof kept the young mind from the natural relief of speech. All afternoon her attention was divided between thought of possible vagrant children in distress, and pity for the dead young man who lay upon the beach. All afternoon her brain teemed with the idea of her pilgrimage, the circumscribed duties of her life jostling the difficulties of a contemplated journey in the world. She would be afraid to go. Yes — and she ought to ask permission. But was it not virtue to go on a holy mission, and what was the use of asking leave

when one knew it would be refused? The nuns had not felt as she felt about the little children and the judgment of the storm had come upon them. They would not let her go, but when she came back all would understand it had been a pilgrimage.

She was afraid to go, and she wanted to go. More and more she wanted to go for the love of life and the overweaning desire of knowledge; and, as is often the case, in this crisis she did not realize her own need, or the nature from which these impulses welled to action, but talked with herself of ministering to the destitute, genuinely believing herself actuated by pity, and in a high purpose devoting herself utterly to the need of others.

All afternoon her busy thoughts played hide and seek, desire dodging hesitation. And on that evening it pleased the Mother Superior to read aloud certain passages from the life of Saint Peter. "The walls of the prison were shaken, and the chains fell off, and the doors were opened." As the familiar assertions of the miracle fell on her ears in the low, smooth, well-accustomed voice, the child-nun's eyes grew larger and larger and more deeply dark, until the pupil overflowed the iris. To one bred as she was in the close atmos-

phere of religious superstition, it would have been strange had not coincidence assumed the form of dispensation. These words came to her as a revelation of divine will, a message, an unqualified command. Was not calamity an omen? Had not the walls of the content been shaken?—more, did they not now lie flat by the sea, leaving her way out unimpeded?

The girl could hardly restrain her impatience till the sisters had parted for the night. She did not remove her clothes nor make any preparations for her going, being too ignorant of the nature of the undertaking, and too wholly inspired by what she believed the sanction of God. to consider such necessity.

Berenice stood at her window overlooking the garden, waiting until silence should give her the assurance of unsuspected departure. And when leaving she went to the chapel and knelt for the last time before the statue of the Madonna and the Christ; vowing herself again to the protection of children, and commending her undertaking to the intercession of the Virgin. As she passed out by the ever-burning shrine of Santa Maria, she remembered the young man upon the beach and took two candles from their places. In such a

time of wild irregularity what was a candle more or less to the Saint?

Outside the night was still and soundless but for the lessened sobbing of the waves. Through the broad white light of a full moon she hurried on, jealously guarding the flame of her candle so that both hands were occupied with it and her habit left to drag upon the ground. It was not easy thus to make her way over and among the rocks, with stumbling and uncertain steps; and she found it slow progress till she passed the second point. From there the girl walked softly, if more surely, as one who treads on sacred ground. With anxious eyes she searched the deep shadow beyond, beside the rock, and found it there as she had left it. No hint of trepidation quivered in her soul as she drew near to that still form lying hard upon the sand. No intimacy with complex emotions of a strenuous life had taught the young heart fear of death. It pitied, but it did not dread, the silent thing. The girl felt a sort of comradeship for the dead man, as youth calls to youth. It seemed as though they two were in an enterprise together, and he was the only really young humanity with which she had ever had to do.

Boring and building a little in the sand on

either side of him, Berenice lighted her second taper, and set each in its miniature sconce. And as their flames rose straight in the windless air, she knelt above him, and prayed, and tried to cross his hands upon his breast, but the fingers, straight and stiff, resisted her, as did the arm, and stayed immovable. His left hand she robbed of a signet ring, yet counted it no robbery. "This will remind me to pray for him," she told herself as she hung the trinket, now a sacred relic, on her rosary. And she continued to kneel by him, chanting softly a part of the mass for the dead: "Requiem æternam dona eis Domine," her sweet voice rising subdued, yet clear and solemn, and as straight into the high heaven as the steady candle flames still burning in the tranquil air — surely the strangest ritual ever sung above the body of a Jew! And so she left him sadly in the voiceless night.

That part of the shore is a long succession of little bays and rocky points. Poor Berenice did not know enough to seek the road. One after another the sandy edges made her way easy, and one after another the rocks increased her weariness; increasing too in steep declivities and perilous difficulty. Toward midnight she rested, but was far too fearful to indulge in sleep; and about day-

break she came in view of a coast town, which brought her lagging footsteps to a sudden halt.

In the pale dawn she could see herself also, a little, and the condition of her clothes dismayed her. Already, in so short a distance of her pilgrimage, she had achieved the ragged garment — too much so! The girl's instinctive modesty shrank from such tatters, displaying as they did, through holes and terrible hanging rents, frank glimpses underneath. For she had scrambled and climbed and slid and pushed through patches of cultivation and over bare stones for perhaps five miles during the night. She twisted and turned and worked at the remnants of her skirt, knotting and unknotting loose ends till almost in despair; while the ever increasing light grew steadily upon her. She could not go forth into the strange world naked — it seemed almost so to her — and to remain meant discovery and punishment. Whatever Berenice fancied the reception due a pilgrim fresh arriving from a foreign land, she had no mistaken idea of that awaiting, and surely to be meted out, in case she should be obliged to return, or should be overtaken and forcibly escorted back to the convent, before her mission had been accomplished.

The idea threw the girl into a panic, and, as an

animal seeking cover, she cast about her wildly for escape. None offered, only the sun shot warning rays above the violet sea, and day revealed the ravages of night. Courage fled with her spent strength, and she sank upon the stones hopeless. Then to the tear-dimmed eyes deliverance appeared. Strewn all about her was more wreckage, a fantastic collection, from broken bits or things to a boat itself, stove in and lying upside down, eloquent of disaster; and from a trunk, burst open by the waves and flung far up, a scattered array of garments trailed across the shore. These she laid hands on, frantically, and shaking them out in haste found them men's things, but whole.

Berenice decided at once to substitute them for her rags. The clothes were of coarse stuff, and harsh from the salt water in which they had soaked and dried, and she did not understand the way of them, so she laid them out one by one on the sand and studied the problem. It took a good deal of time, but finally the girl clothed herself and started on, in her ignorance of the world lacking the shame of male attire as she had lacked the fear of death.

Freed in movement to an unbelievable degree, and glad of the freedom, she went forward with

hanging head. The light was broad and full upon her now, and her eyes bent on the ground became attracted, fascinated, by the unfamiliar action of her own feet. And suddenly the double value of the change flashed its significance. These clothes would neither cling nor tear, but better still, they would not cry aloud her flight. Once she had grasped the idea of disguise, intuition and the instinct of self preservation set her wide awake to its advantages. Her bridges were burned indeed, and she alone to face the world. But soon much of odd experience and strange emotion had chased all recollection of her new apparel from a quaintly unselfconscious mind. Berenice stood still to view the town — the first town she had ever seen! And she entirely forgot herself.

There it lay — so much of it! Stretching around the whole bay and piling up house above house to half the height of the hills. The enormity of it almost frightened her. "This must be a city!" she thought. "And certainly it is a very great place — I am in the world!"

Immediately the girl became shy of advancing and made a detour inland, climbing the hills till she struck a road which she followed, going slowly, in deep thought; for having come upon the world, the little stranger was now at a loss

how to accost it. Ultimate solution of the problem she was saved, however for the world was first to speak.

Absorbed in her troubled contemplation, and moving now so wearily that she hardly seemed to move at all, she blundered into a gravel pit where two men were about to begin work. Rough fellows, but jovial of their kind, and genial as their nation loves to be, they hailed the youth. Whereupon the knees in the baggy trousers began to shake, and the heart beat so wildly under the pilfered flannel shirt that Berenice could hardly hear her own voice answering them in French. Not the colloquial tongue, had her hearers known, but a language gathered from old manuscripts of a cloister library.

To these honest fellows it was all the same, a foreign speech. And they refrained from further questioning, but as they talked together in the manner of the country, volubly, the girl soon understood that they fancied her to be one cast ashore from the wreck. Certainly her clothing, stained with sea water, and her bruised hands argued enough of hardship for the part. With much gesticulation the two workmen explained to her that a sloop which lay in harbour from the storm, would willingly convey any survivors of the catas-

trophy back to Naples, the port from which that most unfortunate ship had started. They led her to the side of the pit, from where the harbour could be seen, and pointed out the boat already making preparations for departure; and in good will urged the lad to necessary haste. It was no use. Strength was spent. Hunger and the long fatigue of her all night tramp at last overcame the brave spirit. She could only sink down against the rude wall, shaking her head, and trying not to give the lie to her disguise by a sudden rush of tears.

Seeing her exhaustion, and for pity of her imagined plight, the older man opened his lunch and shared its scanty contents with the sufferer; who ate the coarse food greedily, thanking him with smiles uncommonly pretty for a youth. Glad to see the boy revived, the two good souls set him speedily upon his way, by a zig-zag path down the steep side of the hill, leading directly to the harbour.

And so Berenice fared tremulously to her first voyage.

IV

THE PILGRIM

I

Jasper Nott arrived from his unexpected journey, found himself at loose ends. He had hoped to be invited to join Mrs. Lane and Margaret on their Italian travels. But cordial as the latter had been in her amused surprise at meeting him on the ship, and afterwards over certain plans they made for expeditions together in Paris, there had been no word of seeing the ladies again before that time. Nevertheless the young man found himself in a very happy frame of mind. He cabled his people, and learning that his brother's yacht lay at Alexandria and intended to make Naples the next week, he decided to await her there.

On the whole, a few days alone, free to wander undisturbed in pleasant places of its own making, were not unwelcome to Jasper's mood. He knew of certain things in the locality well worth

another visit, and made a grand tour of the city, refreshing his critical faculty on the artistic quality of mosaics and studying the chromatics of Neapolitan character; forming quaintly conclusive opinions, all to be expressed in writing to the one appreciative woman.

For the first time in his life Jasper had set before him the accomplishment of a definite object, concerning the value of which he had no question. His quixotic liking for Margaret when he watched her pass out from the tea room with Paul Solomon, was one thing — inspired by the way she walked as he told her later — the love and admiration he felt for her after two weeks of intiate companionship, quite another. He missed her sorely, and wondered how much he was missed, and spent considerable time in the new, untiring delight of love's ecstatic contemplation.

"To be missed is, perhaps, the most effective thing in the world," Jasper mused, as he drank his solitary tea on the veranda of Bertolini's hotel.

His eyes rested on Vesuvius blushing her farewell to the setting sun, and it seemed to him as though each little pink house in the folds of her purpling skirt must be the home of some exquisitely tender love. The colour symphony faded to ashes of roses and Capri stood out darkly, her

double profile cold-cut against the sky. The music of the orchestra trembled and died, as all the city seemed to die in voiceless harmony, and lie asleep, until presently the little lights of the Piazza Vittorio twinkled cheerily out of the gathering gloom.

Day after day the lover and artist bathed in the beauty of this scene; but finally, hearing the yacht was delayed he decided to move over to Sorrento. Not that he had tired of his big confidential companion, and her thousand phases, but to avoid an American mother with daughters, acquaintances just arrived at the hotel, who had discovered the young Englishman with effusive joy, being better "posted" on his connections in Debrett, than concerning the state of his affections. Nott thought the four women loud, full of ill-bred enterprise and apparently unsnubbable in their robust vulgarity, and they annoyed him greatly. Under such circumstances he found it boring to play the bore, so he crossed the bay, and took up temporary quarters still within reach, he fancied, of post office and cable. And there, in the village of a handful, the now historic tempest caught and stayed him.

From his room, which literally overhung the sea, Jasper lost himself at first in the magnificent

wonder of the storm. He could feel the violence of the angry waters dashing against the rocks. Holding fast to the balcony high perched on a wall that rose sheer out of the cliff, seemingly part of it, he looked down into the heaving, swirling breast of the ocean, rising as though it would engulf him where he stood, then dropping away again to twice the depth below. This was a dizzy business in the fury of the storm, and as the passion of it rose and rose, and still increased, he had no mind for such precarious observation, nor any heart but for anxiety.

The yacht, its occupants and how they fared were all his thought. As soon as the abatement of the storm allowed he drove to Naples and set in motion every modern means to find their whereabouts. And with nerves torn, upset, harassed and worried he paced the long sea view of Bertolini's in uncompromising, most uncivil mood, adding the cope-stone to a great wall of animosity which those four neglected American women had begun to build across his path.

At last news came, from a small harbour on the south coast. His brother's skipper, being a canny Scotchman, had run for shelter early, appreciating the risks of a Mediterranean storm so, in spite of the tremendous loss on all sides, they had nothing

worse to report than damage to the yacht and a further delay for necessary repairs.

Crumpling the message in his hand Nott looked about him. With mind at ease he realized it a glorious morning and began to laugh at his own fears, his spirits rising boyishly in sheer relief and animal enjoyment. Gazing over the green embowered city and glittering water, and open sun-blazed sky, Jasper saw it a magnificent fair day, one in which to go somewhere, to do something, to make adventure.

The East having been unfriendly to him, he now choose the West, Capo with its bold rocks and shimmering silence, and made the sleepy horses wake to a smart pace for Naples. Today his spirits raced with everything and won the racing. Driving was barred at the "view," beyond which a large portion of the road had been washed out, so that those who were bound for the shore were obliged to use their feet. Nott bade the driver wait and started down. He was in a mood for physical exercise and the walking pleased him. His mood was for emergencies, for anything that might turn up, what Margaret called his "mountain mood," when boredom had no part in either thought or action. And the very first thing he

came upon around the curve of the miniature beach promised him entertainment.

"Hullo!" cried Jasper, half in apology, as he almost fell over an odd little figure seated in the sand with his back against a well sunk crib.

The boy took it for a greeting and answered in Italian, making a wild dive at the same time to save the fruit he was eating from such dangerous onslaught; and then, with the ready courtesy of his race, offered the stranger a share.

Nott addressed him in English, for the baggy pair of tweeds, a ruddy, healthy, fair face, and his red hair bespoke a countryman. But the stranger shook his head, not understanding; and, at that, something oddly attractive in his smile and in his movements made Jasper take a seat on the end of the crib and accept a tangerine.

"Is this breakfast or lunch?" he asked, reverting to the foreign tongue and sniffing the sweetly pungent skin of the fruit.

"Both," promptly replied the boy, thereby causing Nott to regret his mouthful and determine on having a guest to lunch, but he continued eating the tangerine with a relish.

"I took you for an Englishman," Jasper said, casting a quick look at the tweeds and noting also a much battered Tyrolese hat on the sand.

"You've been to England perhaps, recently?" Thinking to himself, "I'd swear to the toggs, an unmistakable Bond Street cut."

"No, I've never been there — Not yet."

"Not yet — so you're going eh? Well, the bags are top hole! Tell me, now, how did you come by the clothes?" There was a breezy, direct inoffensiveness about Nott's curiosity. The garments being much too big for the wearer, a ludicrous mis-fit, he could not resist pressing the point.

"The clothes were there and I took them." The simplicity of the reply amused the man of the world.

"That's one way," he admitted, tossing the tangerine skin bit by bit into the sea. "A short way, but not always safe. It's sometimes misunderstood, don't-yer-know, and then they call it by an ugly name."

"But the dead man could not want them."

Nott started. Amazement whetted his curiosity. From the careless mood of one who questions to kill time he jumped to a live interest. Looking keenly at the boy, who gazed straight back at him wonderingly, Jasper formed the idea that behind those serious gray eyes might lie serious, original thoughts. He had evidently come upon

Romance red-handed, and took his own way to draw the story. Chucking another piece of skin into line with those on the water, he asked lightly,

"What have you been up to, youngster? Committing murder as well as theft?"

After one look into his face the man had no doubt of the boy, it was just his way of asking, but from the other's startled expression it seemed, for a moment, as though he had shot straight, if at a venture; the next he realized the youth's dismay.

"Murder! Oh, no. It could not have been murder! — The man was drowned."

"Ah, you have been through the storm! And borne the brunt of it." Jasper was quick to take the clue with its ready explanation of the uncouth costume and the refinement of the lad. "Are you bound for Naples?"

"I came to Naples in a sloop with the survivors."

"You have been wrecked! Where, how did you escape? Tell me about it."

He sat down on the sand beside his new acquaintance and lighted a cigarette, making himself comfortable to listen. But there was no immediate answer. The little fellow hesitated and looked away over the sea.

Too fresh a memory. Too painful for retelling! — What might he not have lost in the heart of the storm? Readily Nott conceded what his fancy made the point.

"All right, my boy, we'll talk of something else. What are you going to do? Where were you off to before the calamity?"

"I am going to America."

"America! It couldn't have been an American ship — we would have heard!"

"I don't know, but I am going to America."

"And I have just come from there."

In the boy's last statement had been a passionate avowal of the love of life, the will to act for himself. Now every feature flashed to eager interest and he clasped his hands crying, "Oh, then, Signor, you can tell me —" But as suddenly the face went grave again. He sat back with folded hands and in a manner befitting a demure girl announced, "I am going to America to get the children."

Jasper stared in astonishment over the odd words and stranger bearing, then burst into a loud laugh exclaiming, "You're a rum'un!"

Only a steady look of pained surprise answered his merriment, at which he laughed harder than

before. "Jove, but you'd make an actor, if you're not one now!"

As the other still did not join his mirth, it began to dawn on the Englishman that the mood was no farce, but pure sincerity, and that he had laughed in the wrong place.

"Sorry," he said, now with a perfectly grave face. "It takes me that way sometimes. What about the children?"

But as a sensitive plant shrinking from the touch, the lad had withdrawn his confidence. Jasper felt the crudity of his own mistake and to make amends began to talk his best about America. All eyes and ears the other listened, a fascinated audience, hanging on his words; but at the end he had not been moved to volunteer any further information about himself.

The man could wait. He stretched his legs comfortably over the sand, and lighted another cigarette. The boy would not smoke, but he watched the proceeding with an interest out of all keeping with the every day act, at last enquiring abruptly, "What do you do that for?"

"I'm sure I don't know!" Nott took the cigarette out of his mouth and looked at the thing, as though personally consulting it for a reason. "I like it. We all do it, don't-yer-know, so I sup-

pose we all like it, and — there you are. Have you ever tried it?"

"I! No — It looks silly."

"A new argument against the weed! But don't hope to convert the Americans. They are great smokers and not a bit averse to looking silly; they call it individuality. — Do you know what that building is, up there — on top of the bluff? A prison! You thought it was a monastery or a convent, didn't you?"

The reply was a decided negative.

"Well, I thought it was a monastery, but it turns out to be a prison, for very bad 'uns — a sort of penitentiary. Wouldn't it be almost worth the pangs of a guilty conscience to live up on that jolly high hill, with nothing to do all day, and one of the finest views on the Mediterranean coast?"

"In a prison!"

"Free board and lodging; and ever so much better view than Bertolini's."

"But — there are bars on the windows!"

"I don't see them."

"There must be bars on a prison! And locked doors, and a great wall around it so that no one could ever get out!"

"You think that would spoil it all, my very literal friend? — perhaps you are right — 'For

I never saw a man who looked so wistfully at the blue.' And Oscar should have known if any."

"I don't like walls. The world is lovelier without them!" Again there rang in the stranger's voice that note of passion. He tasted the wine of life and its intoxication raced in his veins; the joy of liberty was supreme. To Nott his attitude seemed to epitomize history.

"All for freedom, eh! You'll be an enlightened American citizen from the start. But you will find walls can be jolly useful there, on a cold day, when the wind blows."

"Is it far to America?"

"No, not more than two weeks on a fast boat."

"Two weeks!" In the cry were disappointment, consternation, dismay.

Jasper turned to look at him. "That is exceptionally good time, my boy, some boats take more — and cost less. What line are you going by?" Then seeing all was wrong he added kindly, "What are you going to do about this shipwreck business? If you have paid your passage to any port, you know, they are bound to deliver you. They'll put you on board another boat in a week or so."

"But I can't stay here a week, two weeks! I can't stay here at all!"

"Why not? What's the trouble? Your things are gone and you'll want to set up again. Look here, youngster — is it cash?"

"I haven't any money, but it isn't that — they might find me!"

Here was light indeed, a lime light on the situation! "Oh, ho! So you are running away! Come now, make a clean breast of it, and we'll see what can be done."

After a long pause the answer came, with a suspicious tremor in the voice. "I want to find the children first." And thereupon the youth turned his back abruptly and stayed so, long enough to get himself in hand again.

"Had a pretty rough time of it, poor chap," Jasper thought to himself, "Didn't like the idea of the prison. I wonder — no, it couldn't be! Doesn't look a bit guilty. — Still, Italy — one never can tell here! Not an actor but possibly a subject, — political or family quarrel — those children in America sound like the latter." His glance falling on the tangerine skins started a new line of thought. "Breakfast and lunch — no food! That accounts for the breakdown — and probably hasn't a penny. Any amount of pluck in the little chap. By Jove, — I like the

boy!" He rose lazily, and shook the sand from his clothes.

"Come and have a drink on it."

The boy looked up, eyeing him curiously, but did not move.

Jasper tried again. "It's about time for lunch and there is a not bad place over there. Do you care to come?"

"Thank you. I am hungry," he agreed with alacrity, scrambling to his feet. The native simplicity of him was partly what Nott liked. He let the lad eat undisturbed and at the end of the meal brought him to the point.

"I don't want to meddle in your affairs, youngster, but I'm willing to help you if I can. You need help?"

A nod served as answer.

"I don't know what you are running away from, nor why. But I suppose if I help you I become accessory after the crime." The boy nodded again, round eyed, not understanding the phrase. Jasper smiled.

"That's all right. Gentlemen have their own affairs to settle — those children in America." Another whimsical smile played across the speaker's face. "So be it. I'm not here to enforce Italian law. Give me your word of honor you're

not up to any mischief, and I'll see you through."

"Mischief?"

"Yes — harm."

"To the children? — Do you mean any harm to the children?"

"To them, yes. Any harm to anybody?"

"But, Signor, I love them! I wouldn't dream of it. I love them!" Two white hands were flung wide, then clasped together in a passion of affection, while the grey eyes sparkled with anticipation.

The Englishman stared anew. "A queer lot, these Italians! But the boy is all right. He wouldn't act fireworks." Then aloud, "Who was that dead man you spoke of?"

"I don't know; he was on the beach."

"Washed in. Poor chap! — Did you report him?"

The other shook his head. "I burnt two candles and said prayers for his soul."

"You are the rummest one I've ever come across! Where did you get the candles?"

"In the church, of course."

"Well, I don't blame you. I suppose you couldn't have reported it without getting yourself into trouble. Now what are your plans?

How are you going to get away? You haven't any money, you said."

"No."

"Nor any clothes but these?"

"No."

"Have you a ticket?"

"No."

"In the name of all that's questionable, how do you propose to get to America?"

The red head which had been shaken less firmly each time, now drooped; and the owner looked shyly out at Nott, saying, "I don't know how, — You tell me."

The man laughed, pleased in spite of himself by such confidence.

"Margaret le Hunt might justly call you negative! — What a story this will be for her. I certainly must see you through!" He called the waiter, and having paid, explained their course to his companion. "We'll go to my hotel first, — I have an idea I can fit you out so that you will look less remarkable than you do now. Those things are about the right size for an American vaudeville turn with sixteen changes underneath. — Then we can see about a passage. The White Star sails tomorrow."

II

The little stranger was an unusual apparition for Bertolini's, and Mrs. Allenby-Harte thought herself justified in displaying both surprise and annoyance as the oddly arrayed youth stepped into the elevator, and almost into her arms. When she saw Mr. Jasper Nott following, the worthy lady bridled, acknowledging his presence with extreme hauteur, and Nott was much amused by her elaborate dignity, as she made up her mind to show what she was accustomed to, and also tried to drag him into conversation by side remarks concerning the advisability of the management's requiring certain sorts of persons to use the other elevator. Great was her dismay when, stepping from the lift, the Englishman put his hand on the shoulder of the uncouth youth, and drew him toward the balcony, saying,

"Come and see a ripping view."

"Just the same as if he was a duke!" exclaimed Mrs. Allenby-Harte, seating herself where she could watch the young men, while she struggled to regain that degree of composure which she considered "elegant manners."

"What an appalling mistake to make!" her thoughts ran on. "I do hope Mr. Jasper didn't

hear me. — How could anybody be expected to know he was a friend. Such clothes! — What a very odd young man! I wonder who he can be."

The enterprising, sharp old woman had recourse to her lorgnette, and if any one had anything to cover, Mrs. Allenby-Harte's lorgnette should have been a danger signal. Divided between chagrin, anger, and curiosity she sat there in the hall-way until the two men passed her going to Nott's room; and then she turned deliberately and satisfied herself with a long and close inspection from the rear.

"Hm — very odd!" she summed up, as she folded her glass. "Very odd indeed!"

"Is she a friend of yours?" the boy had asked on the balcony.

"I'm sorry it happened, youngster. But you mustn't mind an old bounder like that. She couldn't quite make you out. It's the clothes."

The boy looked dubious. "I suppose it's not — they're not — "

"Quite the smart thing."

"They're not quite the thing." A little flush crept into his face, a slight uneasiness into his manner. Nott laughed kindly.

"Cheer up! As the Americans say, if I told the old dame you were the Count de Costa de Chin-

chilla, or endowed you with any other absurd tuft, she'd be all in a flurry to bag you for the three of Hartes. Come on and have a wash; nothing like a bath and a change to buck one up."

While his guest splashed in the tub Jasper laid out a costume for him. He cast one glance at the toilet articles and other costly trifles spread about the place, but would not let himself think evil of the lad, to whom he had taken an uncommon liking. When, however, almost an hour passed and there was still no sound from the dressing room, Nott laid down his paper. "He's a young dude," the host told himself, but could not help a vague misgiving, wondering if the other door leading from the bath was unlocked. Once admitted it is not easy to dismiss a doubt. After a few minutes more Jasper knocked, and receiving no answer, he called; then opened the door.

There were the things untouched as he had placed them; and in a bunch on the couch lay the boy fast asleep, his red hair uncombed from the bath standing out in a curly mass all over his head; a regular Paderewski mop had it been a few shades lighter.

"Done up, poor kid! I'm evidently cast for the three bears in this revival of a nursery drama, but we needn't have Silverlocks out of the window yet.

Let the youngster sleep. — I may be no end of an ass, but I'm ashamed of having mistrusted him." Thereupon the good natured fellow went off to secure a second cabin passage to New York.

When he returned Nott thought it time to waken the boy. The little figure stood up stretching, and yawning and rubbing sleepy eyes. Baggy mufti may cover much, but in the folds of a thin silk bathrobe there is no disguise. Jasper stood dumb; a frown gathering heavily. He crossed and wheeling the stranger about by the shoulders searched the face in the light. But instead of being disconcerted the other returned his gaze steadily with honest eyes.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"What? — I thought you knew."

"Thought I knew! How so? I've been calling you 'boy' all along."

"Not since I cried."

"Cried! — That was a plucky effort for a girl." Remembering the circumstance Jasper relented a little.

"You said those clothes weren't — weren't right, and I thought you meant that. I thought you knew — I truly did. She knew."

"Who knew? Who do you mean?"

"The fat Signora you called Bounder?"

Nott whistled. "The devil, she did! — How could she tell? You fancied it from her rudeness, that was all."

"She knew," protested the girl. "She doesn't like you."

"Confound her! No. There isn't any love lost on either side. We've got ourselves into a jolly mess! — What am I to do with you now? — What's your name?"

"Berenice."

"Go on."

"That's all — Berenice."

"Have it your own way! I'll know soon enough! I suppose I'll have all your family right down on my track too. Oh, you delightful innocent, Jasper Nott! You bally, bally ass; to get yourself mixed up in this sort of thing — and in Naples of all places in the world! — And just now! What will Margaret think of it? A fine story indeed it will be for her if Mrs. Allenby-Harte catches the wind! — Go slow, go slow," he counseled himself. "The girl is a lady — may be anybody, and she confesses to running away; probably from an unwelcome marriage. She will be followed closely, and just let a breath of scandal connect me with the affair — Presto! A hot headed Italian father! Brothers inflamed

for revenge! The entire male element of an irate family about my ears. They have their own way of settling those things in Naples. A dark corner, a deft hand — and no questions asked or answered." Nott grinned with delight over this imagined melodrama. His command of the language was sufficient to appreciate the girl's speech. They had conversed partly in Italian, partly in French; and although her knowledge of the latter tongue seemed to him more quaint than practical, it left not a doubt of her former environment having been an educated society. He knew something of Italian social life and also could fill up the story. "A question of marriage likely, to some revolting old Croesus; custom to be sure, but all wrong. And why shouldn't the little thing have a say in the turning of her own life? His sympathies were with Berenice, ignorant of the world, but no fool, and a plucky enough little devil. "But how to get the young lady out of here? By Jove! I'll swear the old lynx will be watching at the elevator all day.'

"If I did the wise thing, Miss Berenice," he said aloud, "I'd hand you right over to the authorities to be advertised and claimed. That is what one does with found property."

"No, oh no. You wouldn't do it. You wouldn't betray me!"

"You use a strong word."

"No, you couldn't do it! They'd punish me. They'd shut me up without food. — I'd never, never be able to get out again! You won't, you mustn't do such an unkind wickedness against me!"

With a white face she threw herself before him where he sat, and on her knees besought him.

"Please, please — " she cried, and leaning forward, clutched his shoulders. Don't, oh, don't send me back! You promised to help me."

Jasper tried to draw himself away from her clinging. Her face was close, close to his, yet there was no coquetry about her, only an intensity of apprehension. She importuned him like a frightened child. And because he was a man, and human, and knew her now a woman smelling sweetly from her sleep, he pushed her from him.

"Behave yourself!" he admonished, harsh from his own emotions. "Go and sit on that chair."

One cannot plead from a distant chair with passionate moving entreaty. Berenice sat still and dumb, but the serious, wistful, scared little face was more eloquent than words.

Nott sighed, and paced the length of the room.

"How am I to get you out of this without a scandal?"

"My old clothes," the girl suggested timidly.

But the man frowned. "I cannot leave you to run about the world in those things. It's not decent — nor safe." His face cleared. "The disguise was good, it quite deceived me."

At which, seeing him less angry, Berenice clapped her hands. "Did you really take me for a man? What fun!"

Jasper laughingly corrected her. "Not a man, Miss Berenice. I took you for a sort of hobbledehoy — and the hair, that put me off too; it has the look of having always been cut."

"It has always been short, like this. I put these things on because mine were torn, and I could walk better. I did not mean to deceive people." She hung her head in shame at such enormity.

"You took me in anyway, but, as you say, we cannot be sure it deceived that old dame. You'd better not try the lark again. And, look here, youngster, you mustn't take up with strangers so easily. Weren't you afraid to come here with me?"

"Afraid. With you!" the girl exclaimed in

wide wouder. "But you are so kind and good — and you promised to help me."

"I'm not good," Jasper replied shortly. "And every man who promises to help you need not be kind. I wouldn't go to lunch with a stranger again, if I were you,— ladies don't do it."

"But I was hungry."

"A perfect baby." Nott groaned, feeling conscience stricken about the ticket in his pocket. "Don't do it, little girl, I beg you. And I positively forbid you to go to a hotel with any man. To any place like this. — Do you understand?"

Berenice nodded gravely. "I won't," she promised, "with any one but you."

Nott looked at her, perched as she was in the purple gown, her bare toes clutching the rung of the chair, her arms embracing her knees, and her sun-burst of unruly hair topping all.

"You're a very funny little thing," he said. I'll look after you tonight, and then you'll be on the boat — and the gods protect you!"

To himself he added: "She's a darling little beauty."

Berenice looked shyly at him from underneath her brows. In attitude and glance the man observed a sort of latent coyness, promise of a fu-

ture conscious development into the womanly; the only feminine trait about her manner.

"Then you are going to help me? — You promised."

"I know I did. I promised to see you through; but I made that promise to a boy."

"He was me. It's the same thing."

Jasper sat down opposite to her. "Little Berenice, I'm willing to keep my promise, but a boy can take his chances. It is another thing sending a girl off to a strange place. Suppose you get into trouble in America? What about it — how will I feel then?"

"You won't know."

"Which is to say my responsibility ends here, or perhaps doesn't even begin. You'll try to go to America anyway. Are you going to anybody; is there anybody there you know?"

"I must go and get the children."

"Well, what about those children? Do you know where they are? Can you find them? Are you going to them?"

"Oh, yes," she said, brightening. "I'm going to bring them back. They will want so much to come. And I won't have any difficulty finding them, the American lady, who knows all about it, said so."

He leaned back, considerably relieved. Evidently the girl had a definite plan though she did not care to divulge it.

"If there is an American woman running the thing on that side I suppose you'll be all right. And I can give you a letter to the Sister in charge of the Sacred Heart Orphanage. If anything goes wrong she will help — she is a friend of mine. You don't want to tell me anything more about who you are and all that?" The girl shook her head. "You don't think I could make it all right for you with your people here?"

"You could not see my people.— And I can't stay, I can't stay. I would be so unhappy now."

Jasper, quite willing to be out of the affair, did not press the point. "I have no right to interfere," he said to himself, and aloud, "Well you must have some clothes whatever happens, and it looks to me as though I'd have to find them. I cannot trust anybody here."

He smiled slowly, as several ridiculous possibilities of the situation dawned upon his mind. Then his eyelids drooped, his eyebrows ascended, blankness ruled his face. With an indolent, almost lackadaisical ease, he took up hat and gloves and cane, and after looking at Berenice without expression for fully half a minute, began to speak.

"I'm going to purchase — ah, some little things; one or two articles I find I need. I think it would be as well if you did not allow any — ah, inquisitive person to enter the room. You might lock the door."

The girl gaped open mouthed and open eyed, while this remarkable inversion of the man she knew elaborately removed a particle of dust from the lapel of his coat, choosing for the operation a small gold mounted shell-backed brush from the varied array.

"You are so different!" she gasped.

For another long moment he looked at her with a fixed, impenetrable stare. "By Jove! Am I?" And with this unintelligible English he turned and left her standing in the middle of the floor, with gaze riveted on the spot where he had changed.

Jasper clothed himself purposely for the expedition in the armour of assumed personality. He knew he had to face, under funny conditions, the humorous, all-wise, not-to-be-deluded glance of merry Neapolitan clerks. And if he was to be the butt of a lark with circumstances, he determined to be, at least, a fearless joke.

When he accosted the first youth on the floor in his most impervious manner, announcing his

need of an entire wardrobe for a young lady, that aid to the dispensing of lingerie and silk stockings grasped the situation in a moment. He giggled audibly, with back discreetly turned, and dug another youth in the ribs, whispering at the same time to one of the young women, which caused the dark haired beauty to eye the Englishman again, and move off wreathed in smiles.

Obliging, if jocose, the man without obtrusion became genuinely interested in the proceedings. Certain sub-rosa details proved difficult. And Nott's curiously expressed delicacy of taste, when it came to the choosing of a hat and gown, made the middle aged, full figured woman who served him palpitate with a quite evident degree of sentimental feeling. She being a shrewd saleswoman, moreover, Jasper was allowed his head; and under mild persuasion, suggestion of this or that, and reminder of maidenly needs not yet considered, he gathered together a mass of incongruous purchases, and the carriage was piled high.

It would have been hard to say which of the three employed had been most amused by that hour's bargaining.— But certainly the merchant profited! Nott was presented with an account in the aggregate calculated to startle him from beautiful repose. He tabulated the circumstance,

mentally, for future use, as a situation in which, had he been wearing a monocle, he would have dropped it, paid the bill; and then drove to one of the smaller hotels and engaged a single room for a lady.

At the last moment, as fate would have it, he was prompted to stop at the Galleria Vittoria and collect a Tauchnitz ordered some time before. As his open carriage with its grotesque load drew up, the door swung back, ushering out, full face upon him, Mrs. Allenby-Harte and all three of her daughters. The four women completely filled the narrow pavement; no loophole of escape offered. Jasper was fairly caught, the dress box and the hat box and the shoe box bearing loud witness against him.

The younger generation gurgled, and Mrs. Allenby herself glared; while with the perfection of polished indifference the "very eligible young man indeed" raised his hat to them across the incriminating pile, alighted, and passed in. Before the door closed behind him he heard their voices rush to a babble of exclamation.

"Well they can read the names on the boxes, hang it all! — They sail tomorrow," was his thought, "and a jolly good thing, too, or they'd have the story, with dear knows what embellish-

ments, all over Naples. And Gregory and the rest of them coming in on the yacht any day. Why! There'd be no end to the thing! This is the first and last time Jasper Nott ever adopts a young woman! I need to be looked after myself. I need a nurse.— Ass! If I get her off without exposure I won't even give the little witch my address. I'll make a clean breast of it all to Margaret, she'll believe me, and then we will ring down the curtain."

Nott pocketed his book, paid savagely, and gave the order back to the hotel. To his relief all sign of the American women had vanished, and he did not see them again.

He shut Berenice without ceremony into the bathroom while the many parcels were brought in; then, as reward for temporary banishment, turned her loose on their contents. The girl opened the first box shyly, timid over so strangely new an operation, but when she saw the dress, and realized it was to wear, and while Nott held it up to try the shade, she went all cold in fearful joy.

"It is so pretty!" she cried, clasping her hands, not daring to touch the lovely thing. "So pretty! Is it really for me? You are very good!"

"Try the other packages," the man suggested, enjoying himself immensely.

The feminine instinct awakened, she flew with nimble fingers, from one parcel to the next. They had a sort of Christmas party all over the room, as Jasper said, and every article appeared a marvel of beauty to the girl. Smothered cries of wild delight, rapture, and jubilant admiration of the dainty purchases delayed them, and as time slipped on they made amusement of it. The shoes fitted, wonder of wonders! Jasper officiated at their trying on; and the coat was not so bad. But even in grave council they could not find the which-way of the hat; nor could they persuade it to sit firmly on the short red hair.

"You ought to understand these things," he rallied her.

"I never had one before," she affirmed, but the staggering truth was lost in the glorious confusion of the moment.

Afterwards came the serious business of dressing. Nott was called in to help with the last buttons of the frock, and then he turned the little figure about again and again.

"Ripping! Ripping! By Jove, it is, you know, awfully!"

He was so delighted with her delight and pleased with the result of his own choice that he wondered vaguely why he had never bought

clothes for a woman before. "Frenchmen do it. — We English are too beastly masculine and sporting!"

Berenice was amazingly pretty in the excitement of the moment, and her happiness gave a becoming piquancy to her face. The man, preeminently a colorist, had chosen a gown of blue, soft material, quite unsuitable for a journey to America, but a lovely compliment to the "Titian" of her hair. With ready ingenuity, Berenice pulled a ribbon over the brim and pinned it to the other side to hold the hat in place, the straight dark band under her chin being the last touch needed to make a portrait of her.

"Darling little beauty!" Nott exclaimed again, this time aloud.

"Am I? Am I? Do you like me? It's all your choice. You are so good to me!"

"We'll go now," but still he did not go. He glanced out into the corridor. "All clear! — Everybody at dinner." Then he shut the door again.

It had been his intention to dine with her in town and then leave her, now he found it not so pleasant to think of leaving this most desirable little woman, rosy, saucy, pulsing with life, eager and unspoiled. Jasper walked around her once

more, trying to make himself believe his satisfaction lay in the result of his own contrivance — the artistic effect.

"Aren't we going?" Berenice queried.

He drew nearer to her. "Are you so anxious to leave me, little girl?"

"But you are coming too."

"It won't be like this — among a lot of other people." The man came close and laid his hand on her. "This is good-bye."

Happily for them both there was no shade of conscious charm in the girl. Sweet candor met and checked Jasper's admiring glance. Innocent, child-like, unguarded, she permitted him to touch her as he would; and seeing it, ashamed, he turned aside the motion to arrange the lace on her bodice.

"Berenice,— will you kiss me good-bye?"

"Then shall we go?" she asked, raising her face to him simply.

He hesitated, his lips almost on hers. "Has anybody ever kissed you before?"

"No one. I have kissed the Madonna because I love her."

It was pure truth. In all her life the child had never known a human kiss. The strange little answer touched Nott, yet he lingered. It would be easy to take her in his arms, gratifying, entirely

sweet and harmless, and she waited with lifted face. Then he straightened up.

"I won't be the first, child — this will not do. We must go!"

Turning abruptly he opened the door and held it for her, saying to himself,

"The youngster's so damned innocent — and good!"

"I'll say an Ave for you each night," Berenice called in parting.

There were tears in the eyes looking back from the ship, and misgiving in the man's heart; yet, rank unbeliever as he was, he liked the promise.

V

THE SECOND NEGATIVE

All one could see of the man was immaculate feet, the lower extremity of a pair of brown trousers, the fingers of two hands stretched at a wide angle, and a shock of black hair, the rest being obscured by the morning edition of " le Figaro." Of the woman more might be discovered; even before turning she became a presence, a pervading subtle perfume, yet equally a visible abstraction, the large writing table seeming to swallow her personality as the blotter absorbed a residue of her thoughts.

In training it is easily possible to do more than one thing at a time; and keeping an ear open for odd bits of information from the other department of pursuit becomes one of the fascinating habits of continual association. These two were happy in silence as gossips may be when well into the pace of friendship, each allowing the other interest in his own occupation without losing the all powerful sense of companionship; but they

threw remarks across to each other at happy intervals.

"What sort of a man is he?" the woman asked, without so much as a hesitation in the travel of her pen, in answer to the result of a noted damage case.

"One who will walk up a square built stairway on the opposite side from the girls, in order to watch their ankles."

The writer took long enough to insert this description into the middle of her page. "Can't you just see him, Paul? The blasé young roué!" — Aloud she commented,

"Shows an attention to detail! — Austrian?"

"Well, yes. Swiss family — lived in Vienna all his life. A weak youth, bound to get into trouble sooner or later. Never known to associate with a decent woman and cannot hold his own with the others. He wasn't equal to this one anyway." — "She has fleeced him seven hundred thousand francs." — "By Jove! About thirty thousand pounds!"

"Plus a first class ticket to New York?"

Nott grinned behind his paper, well aware Margaret was laughing at him.

"I only poneyed up for a second." No answer forthcoming to that the man took the hint of

silence and absorbed himself again in the political, foreign, and dramatic news.

When Margaret had asked if she might go on from Florence with Mrs. Thresher and her daughter, the former had replied in her fluent, emphatic way,

"We'll be right glad to have you with us, my dear, but if you don't want to shop from peep of dawn till dark, I give you warning you'll be out of it. It's up to me to get Maud's things for the wedding, and it's going to be a regular rustle round. We won't have a minute for side stepping to picture galleries and tea parties. But you come right along and do the highly intellectual for us. I guess you're equal to culture stunts for a whole party, Margaret le Hunt!"

But Margaret had not lacked companionship. Regularly the motor-brougham whisked the timid Maud and her enthusiastic mother off on a round of milliners, costumers and all things necessary to the due preparation of the bride to be. And as regularly, if not before, then a very few minutes later, the trim maid announced: "Mr. Jasper Nott."

Mrs. Thresher, a lively widow, who combined worldly perspicacity with a rare ability to mind her own business — and her daughter's — had

brought that young lady's second season to a happy end by an alliance with the family of Crew; and now occupied herself in the frantic delight of giving to her only child all the prettiness she had herself longed for, when a score of years before, with an empty purse and a few plain gowns, she had married and gone west to rough it.

Of course she had heard the story of the disagreement between the cousins from Margaret, and again from Helen, with charge, defence and explanation; in the heat of which she wisely held her peace.

"At the worst only a young man's prank! And absurd of Mrs. Lane to make so much fuss," was her private opinion. For Mrs. Thresher during her husband's meteoric career, from the editorship of a small local newspaper to a seat in the House of Representatives, had dealt largely and variously with men. She acknowledged that their morals were mixed, stoically prepared to accept the bad with the good, and followed plutocratic philosophy with a journalistic eye for advertisement, dating from away back, and a fine contempt for cheap scandal as one knowing its common origin.

This good lady would have welcomed Jasper as

Margaret's friend, and a convenient occasion against her American rival; and when the Honorable Algernon, over for a week-end, greeted him in old acquaintance, reviving memories of exploits together at Magdalin; and pronounced him later to the ladies "a very decent fellow," she made Nott free of the flat with a thorough going American hospitality, smacking of her western training.

"I don't know the young man," she said to Margaret. "But if he's a friend of Algie's he must be A. 1. — and anyway you're quite old enough to look after yourself."

It was all her apology for a lax chaperonage, and Margaret only smiled and thanked her. She said little of the quarrel to Mrs. Thresher, but wrote it fully to Paul.

"Such a rumpus! My dear Paul, Helen really is the limit! And I once fancied I could sympathize with her. Do you remember our conversation? I've gone holus-bolus over the fence on Robert's side. How he ever stood it for so long — ! As you know what an angel I am to get on with I leave you to judge between us! By the time we reached Florence feelings were taut — strung like a bow! It only needed Mrs. Allenby-Harte's letter to put the fat in the fire. I'll wager those four women did nothing all the way over

two oceans but write about it. Anyway, everybody we've heard from so far knows the story. Helen couldn't bear Mr. Nott to begin with — I suppose if you don't see through him he is awfully provoking! — And when the budget of scandal arrived, she let loose. My sainted aunt! How did Robert live?

"No doubt you have read the American version. The awkwardness is the foundation of truth in it all. The young man wrote me a very long screed about having helped a little Italian girl, whom he took to be a boy, to skip the country. Met him on the beach, took him to lunch, turned him loose in a bath, and — presto — une charmante petite steps forth! Couldn't that be worked up for the stage? Too risque! Imagine the censors! — As told it was an amazingly indiscreet situation, and I laughed heartily over what must have been, according to Mrs. Allenby-Harte, a very much and carefully expurgated copy!

"Fancying his version to me would help to mollify Helen, I showed the letter, but it was oil on the flames. She preferred to believe the brimstonish additions of a week-end at Sorrento, and hinted indecent details. (He had been at Sorrento too, worse luck, chiefly to escape the three uncomely maidens.)

"My cousin assumed the breastplate of righteousness so indispensable to the armoured accoutrement of a real chaperone, and — lost her head! Went altogether too far, talking of the impudent audacity of a man who would dare to write to a 'nice girl' about his latest peccadillo. (Do you recognize me — a young miss?) And with other warm phrases finally declared that if I insisted on seeing him in Paris, she would refuse to go north.

"I wanted to let things take their course thinking it would blow over; but no, she insisted on my writing to him at once to put off all engagements, at which point the worm — that's me — turned! Oh, Paul, dear man, we had a heavenly row! Perhaps I should attribute it to other regions for Helen's coldness was the sort that burns!

"Needless to say I asserted the full dignity of my years. But through all this thunder and lightning I was a bit up against it, you know, for the last thing I could afford was to quarrel with my comrade. I cannot go hopping about Europe all alone, like a locust coming up out of Egypt — if any escaped the patriarchal retribution — but neither could I submit to being chaperoned like a 'flapper.' (Isn't it a delicious word? Pure Anglo-Saxon! I have just learned it from the Honor-

able Algie.) I do not know what capitulation I might have been forced into had I not struck luck, running across Mrs. Thresher and Maud in the Boboli Gardens. I heard your favorite's unmistakable incisive lingo from the other side of a bushy hedge, made a detour, took the party in the rear, hugged them in turn, and told the whole story and extorted a promise on the spot to take me on to Paris. I was sly, Paul, wise as a serpent, wily as a Jew.— I know Mrs. Thresher cannot bear Mrs. Allenby-Harte. They climbed opposite sides of the same ladder in Topeka, scoring society out of politics, and each knows all there is to know about the other.— So I dropped a hint; acquaintance with Mr. Nott would be like a red rag to the American bull. That fetched her! She promised, honor-bright, cross her heart, and I cake-walked 'The Toreador' all up the path and down again. Then we adjourned to the hotel and had it out with Helen.

"That interview wasn't a Hague Conference, either, I assure you! — But here I am in Paris, having a fine time, and simply longing for you to come over so you can be part of it. Be sure to cable me your sailing, and make it soon — great things will be on foot."

Margaret hesitated — how much could she

write to Paul on such a subject? Dear old Paul! A heart ache was in store for him — but since the thing must be, kinder to speak right out and have it over.

"Die Meistersinger, day after tomorrow. Would you care to go? Listen." Jasper read out the list of performers.

"Very much! It is a splendid caste, and I am never tired of the Wagner laugh."

"Top hole! Then I'll secure a box."

The woman sat biting her pen in thought, and looking at the back of the paper, the white fingers, and the two immaculate feet. While Nott, all unconscious of her scrutiny, continued to read.

"I'm writing to Paul." She volunteered to rouse him.

He laid aside the paper. "Lucky man! It's an interminable epistle. If you take more than half an hour to sign your name and put on the new hat, I cannot be responsible for lunch."

Margaret looked very attractive on the far side of the littered table in a morning gown and plain lace collar; and the young man did not resume his distraction.

"Shall I give him your love?" the scribe asked, tapping her lips with the pen handle.

"Don't do that," said Jasper.

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"What?"

"With the pen. It makes one think things — impossible things."

Margaret frowned terribly.— "And Paul?"

"Give him my very best."

"And tell him you are willing to double the stakes on that bet?"

"What about it? You know it depends on you now —" He would have said more, but Margaret returned to her writing. For a moment the abused pen scampered over the page; then she tossed the sheet to her companion.

"You can see for yourself what I said."

With dancing eyes she watched him stretch a lazy arm for the paper. It had fluttered to the middle of the floor, beyond his reach, and there he sat not moving with eyebrows raised in quizzical ineptitude, his arm extended.

"I weally don't believe I can," he drawled, twiddling the tips of his fingers faintly.

"Of course you can, Silly!" A note of asperity twanged in the woman's voice. Was it excitement and all unintentional?"

Nott jumped for the page with a violent alacrity and an enquiring glance toward Margaret.

Astonished, convulsed, by the unlooked for effect of her accidental brusqueness, her shoulders

shook. The woman knew her power! With head averted, so that Jasper could not see her face, she continued to write, while he read, troubled a little, and wondering.

From the top it began: — "I have had one letter from Helen saying she has gone into retreat in that convent of Santa Maria. Let us hope it will do her a world of spiritual good; her Christian charity needs bracing — yet she was a different creature there. Fancy, she writes, the little novice, whom I told you of, has run off.— Poor child! — I hope she gets away! The convent is a terrible living death for a young thing. I prefer the gaieties of Paris myself, and if one looks hard one can find a mission in the world outside.— I have found mine, and must tell you. I have decided to marry Jasper Nott. In becoming a second negative I hope to make him an affirmative. Congratulations are in order! — I have told you first, Paul."

For a moment Jasper could not believe it; rising he caught a glimpse of Margaret's face and saw his own occasion. From behind her chair the crooked smile played across his face.

"It was good of you to tell me — second." And quietly he laid the sheet back on the table.

The American woman ranked this later as the

most terrible moment of her life, in which her heart, expecting much, gained blank dismay. Jasper had been explicit in his asking and she had claimed her own time and taken her own way in the matter. Intending only playful caprice, had she impinged his dignity? Had his sense of humor really failed? Did he take it amiss? She sat quite still for a half a minute, seeming eternity, and screwed up her courage to look him in the face, reminding herself: "Englishmen do not show their feelings."

Jasper beamed at her, crying:

"I've scored at last! Margaret! Margaret!" Then he proceeded to disabuse her mind of certain mistaken notions about Englishmen.

And neither at the time, nor in the mad interval before Paul's arrival and their marriage at the Embassy, nor even after, did he remember the first half of that momentous page, and the little sister, who had run away; and whom he must have known, had he stopped to think, his boy of Capo.

VI

THE WORLD

I

A sharp frost, laggard remnant of the hard winter, set in about dusk, after a day of drizzling rain, threatening to turn the March evening into a record nightmare of privation and suffering. By seven o'clock, Fifth Avenue went its way cautiously in motors, inconvenienced but not yet routed; while Harlem and the suburbs shivered on foot their various roads, from "subway" and "elevated" to apartment houses, not entirely unmindful of the misery on the East-side.

In a couple of hours' time the streets were well nigh impassable, and traffic dropped away early, the going become too hazardous for either horse or man. Women wise in the vagaries of the American climate had taken the first car home when the frost began. And unfortunate males still at large walked heedfully, feeling their way, with hand on wall or paling, for the innocent look-

ing wet pavements were in fact, death traps of thin, glare ice, and a gusty wind swirling unexpectedly about the corners of tall buildings made all progress a wild uncertainty.

Perfectly respectable citizens clung frantically to lamp posts for support, or exhausted, sought the shelter of doorways, hoping for luck in the form of a passing conveyance. Even the despised hansom, though doubly insecure, was welcome, for locomotion grew a more and more serious problem. Motor vehicles, obliged to creep at a snail's pace, were unable to make the requisite number of trips; discreet owners of horse flesh drove their animals to early shelter; the "elevated" ran intermittently on ice crusted rails; surface cars had long before given up under like difficulties; and the whole effort of belated humanity turned toward gaining the "subway" stations.

The temperature, various as the moods of a spoiled woman, presently relented and a soft snow added its trickery to the general discomfort, and falling thickly cloaked the icy streets in a virgin garment of moist white. About midnight the wind rose tempestuously, putting cold fingers through the clothing of those obliged to brave the elements. And once again the terrors of the cli-

mate beset the sleeping city, and a half and half of rain and sleet driving on with the gusts made night intolerable. There was no protection possible in such a storm. Sharp particles of ice stung the face like broken glass, and the man on the beat went his round with head lowered and drawn in turtle-wise between heavy shoulders encased in rubber.

He did not see the taxi-cab which dashed into and part way around Washington Square with an unwarrantable burst of speed. From behind its wheels unwound over the white street two great black snakes, looped in a violent twist in the middle, where the cab skidded, and, to recover from such uncanny balance, turned about in a circle. It drew up in front of a high house standing just off the square, stranded in its old age, a representative of past generations in a modern world, amid the mushroom growth of commercial buildings now filling that once smart residential locality.

The fare expressed his opinion of the driver, vividly and at length, as he counted out the exorbitant charge; and the latter without reply, but pocketing the tip, whizzed his car away into the darkness at a pace defiant of the universe, and certain to call forth the imprecations of all and

sundry concerned in their own safety. The impudent eye of the tail lamp winked and swerved, and vanished around the corner before Robert Lane had his key fairly out of his pocket.

The entrance of his home receded through a deep porch a few feet back from and above the street. All the outlines of the flat faced house melted together in unbroken darkness, no light or sound of life being anywhere about, yet as the owner of the eerie habitation turned his key in the lock, he felt remarkable conviction of the nearness of some other human being. What his eyes failed to discover in inky blackness, a quick sense of hearing betrayed to him. Unmistakably some one was about the place — perhaps waiting till he opened the door to force an entrance, more probably only vagrant. Tramps often sought shelter on the stone benches, a nuisance of which he found it very difficult to rid the house.

"What are you doing there?" Lane demanded roughly, without opening the door. No answer. "Come out of that."

Complete silence once more, broken only by the sound of splashing rain against the stone. The man struck a match, which served to further intensify the darkness to him, but illuminated his face — a face calculated to establish confidence.

Thereupon the vagrant came out of hiding and addressed him in a timid voice, very faintly.

"Please sir —"

"Good God! A woman on such a night! Have you no other place to go?"

"Please sir —" she said again, and got no farther.

Lane opened the door and reaching for the button, turned a flood of light into the porch. It fell on a medium sized woman wrapped head and shoulders in a rough dark shawl.

"What are you doing here?" he asked again, and kindly. "Have you no place to go on a night like this?"

"Please sir —" The voice came with a piteous note of entreaty, hung a helpless moment in quivering despair, and then broke to liquid flowing Italian. In his youth Lane had studied the language and could make out a little of her speech, quick and faint as it was.

"What a day," he thought, "to greet a traveller from the land of sunshine!" The poor thing did not beg, and he felt a kindly pity for her, and stepping inside motioned the woman to follow. A gust of stinging sleet came with her, and the wind rushing as suddenly and violently out, the vacuum slammed the heavy door to, with

a terrible, reverberating hollow sound, as though to set a seal upon her entrance.

"A nice how do you do!" Robert exclaimed, viewing his guest more closely. It could be seen at a glance that she was wet through, and he now discovered she was not an immigrant as he had assumed. The clinging soaked garments had an air of respectability beyond that class, strangely contradicted by the shawl over her head, from below which the little face peered out at him, a ghost in whiteness, under the searching light.

"You'll have to stay here tonight," the man said. "Come up stairs. I live on the top." Turning the light on at the landing above, he motioned her to go ahead.

She started to move, opened her lips to speak, relaxed her hands in gesticulation, and the shawl fell loose about her shoulders, so that out of the dark mass there glowed finely the tempest of her red locks. At the vision of glorious color crowning the white face, the artist in Lane awakened, and he stared hard at her, the woman staring back at him without a word. Then suddenly, all at once, she collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"A worse business than I thought," he said to himself, bending over her with keen dismay and interest. There was only one thing to do. He ran

above, turned on the lights, and lifting her gently carried her by stages to the fourth floor. Unencumbered of the shawl the girl was thin, and of comparatively little weight, and Lane was a strong man, but even so he was glad enough to rest her on a settle while he went in search of brandy.

Animation crept slowly back to her wan face, and she struggled to sit up.

"Can you manage to walk into the studio?" asked her host in bad Italian.

"Si, Signor," she replied, rising, but clinging to him; and together they entered.

A single gas jet flared from the wall, not attempting to lighten the darkness, all the more overpowering for that ray of brilliance flung so valiantly into the void, as one might take his stand alone, with drawn shining blade, to hold a pass. As her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, an army of huge spectral things seemed to loom out of the waste of dimness. Angular giant forms, which the girl afterwards knew to be easels, but which now, so strange and gallows like, filled her with Sancho-Panzian fears. The place seemed to be too familiar, as though she had returned from her adventurous dreaming, and stood once more beneath the vaulted roof in the chapel of Santa Maria.

She walked reluctantly like one passing out of life to a close prison, and Robert, taking her timidity for weakness, hastily put her into a chair. Then he turned on the lights.

Had Aladdin's palace burst upon her startled gaze, Berenice could not have been more thrilled and thoroughly confounded, turning giddy with the revelation which swept her back again from memory of a convent chapel into the unreality of worldly life. The girl who thought of stone walls with arched spaces, and stone pavements, and stone seats, half expecting to see the old familiar saints, each in his worn niche, sat dumb, spellbound, entranced. And it was not all due to her limited knowledge, for the studio was in its way, a splendid apartment, filled with the treasures of a versatile collector, who sought in all he touched for decorative value rather than minute perfection of detail.

When the growing impossibility of his home life turned his attention to serious work Lane had built this room for himself on top of a superannuated family residence, and later it became his only quarters. A basement tenant and her husband took care of the apartments, and the rest of the big house stood empty, while the owner drifted into bachelor habits, dining at restaurants, and

seeing his friends less and less often, at one or other of his clubs.

By nature a versatile genius to whom the very ease of the achievement is its most certain enemy, without the spur of unhappiness Robert Lane would probably have devoted himself to a purely social enjoyment, sacrificing ambition to popularity, and wasting his talents in trivial pleasure or the mood of the passing hour. He played a little, sang a little more, composed ridiculous librettos for special anniversaries of club or college, and later, pursuing the spirit of the times, dashed off brilliantly sarcastic critiques of art and artists. Both opera and stage knew the sting of his flippancy, and in his more serious moods he had brought low the vanity of politicians, for his local diatribes were always eagerly seized on by the watchdogs of the press.

Even yet the artist was not sufficiently concentrated in his work to have quite routed the habits of the dilettante. Although Robert lived alone in silence, he must needs live beautifully, and his surroundings were uniquely beautiful as must be the case in all that is evolved from an aesthetic love. Sections of the lower walls were filled with books, and one end of the room by mural decoration in splashing colors and tumultuous design,

from the brush of a fellow student in the Paris atelier, a brilliant devotee of the ultra modern school. Lane had bought the canvas when his friend died, more out of consideration for the little widow, than in admiration of its qualities; and had grown from interest in such eccentricities to awe before the revelation of it, and at last satisfied his wonder by hanging the painting in its present conspicuous position.

The opposite end of the studio formed a balcony, the railing hung with various rugs of tender hues; and from beneath opened the dressing rooms. Their height being considerably less than that of the studio, the architect had contrived above them a small roof garden, entered from the balcony, and made lovable in summer with box and laurel, a pleasant place of vantage lying open to the starry sky, and catching all the little evening breezes, which fainted long before they reached the level of the street below. Now the flat roof offered a rallying ground for the forces of the storm, and was full of tongues in the sibilant rushing of the sleet, and of silences heralding fresh attack.

Hours with the paint-pots had taught Robert a technical expression without words, and given him a blessed understanding of silence. He felt con-

viction of the girl's admiration as she let the seconds slip by without remark, only turning her eyes slowly from one fine object to another, smiling, and he was moved to an answering smile of gratitude for her appreciation as a lonely soul is moved when it touches the prophetic chord of sympathy, or feels a friendship.

The remains of a cold supper on the table aroused the host's indignation against the laxness of Frau Gratz, but a look from his guest told him more plainly than words that starvation as well as fatigue had contributed to her weakness.

"I think we are both hungry," he said, wheeling a chair for her close in front of the fire, and coaxing a blaze from the dying log. "And you are terribly wet."

Berenice sank back gratefully into the depths of the huge arm chair, and stretching her feet toward the fire shivered a little, as though the warmth of ruddy light made the contrast of her recent sufferings dance in too vivid recollection.

"Your feet!" exclaimed Lane. "Yes. Let me do it; you are not fit!"

His manner was brusque though kind, as if he were taking a child firmly in hand, and Berenice making no objection, allowed him to remove the

thin shoes, reduced by icy pavements and deep slush to little better than a pulp.

The girl was so glad to find herself anywhere but in those bleak, wet streets, that seemed to her to stretch interminably all over America. Hours and hours she had wandered through them, with no place to go. Exhausted at the start by weary days of seasickness, delayed, annoyed, confused and frightened by port authorities, and in the end thrown entirely on her own resources, she had fared badly.

Berenice now realized the stranger's purpose in giving her an introduction, in providing some one to care for and direct her in this vast terrible city. But unfortunately Nott's letter had been directed to a Catholic Institution, as he told her, and when a day out from Naples the runaway had torn it up and thrown the pieces over board, watching them flutter downward to the blue water like a flight of tiny white birds. For her liberty was dear to her, once lost she knew it could not be regained, and to appeal to the Church was to surrender life. The little nun still intended to complete her mission, to return to the Convent with the children, but she wanted feverishly to live, to accomplish, to do the thing herself. Yet on that first day in New York, having learned the mercilessness of the world, she

would have been ready to give in had she kept the means by her, or at least directions how to find the Sacred Heart Orphanage, but in the rashness of her ignorance she had thrown all away together.

On she had wandered throughout the day, ceaselessly urged from place to place, till darkness screened her in the porch of the old house. Its stone seat offered rest and so she stayed. — And now she was in a soft chair before a fire. What luxury of ease! Like a cat she wriggled and burrowed deeper into comfort, and Lane smiled to see it.

Suddenly the girl sat erect demanding, "This isn't a hotel, is it?" And when her host reassured her she sank back again murmuring contentedly. "It's just because I promised."

"Funny little thing," he thought, "she must go to bed. It is impossible to send anywhere tonight in the storm, and she needs rest and sleep, tomorrow we will find her friends." He was too much distressed at seeing her in such a plight, and too kindly sympathetic to trouble the girl with questions, and for the present busied himself bringing food and making tea.

Berenice, revealing her grateful thanks in every look and action, had time to observe the host while he officiated between the table and her chair.— A

tall man slightly stooped, so that he appeared no more than medium size; above the heavy shoulders was set a large head with a thick crop of hair, prematurely silvered, yet conveying no idea of age, because of the fresh coloured, clean shaven face, which in itself looked less than Robert's years.

Full eyes gazed calmly observant on the kaleidoscopic world, while the curve of his lips expressed humor, and the corners of his mouth a sweetness of character, guaranteeing tolerance to the failures of others and himself, a tolerance short of weakness, his chin declared.

The whole personality of the man revealed force, as it appeared massive. Yet studying the handsome face and head, feature by feature, it was difficult to say how, or wherein, that dominant character expressed itself. It was there, as all who knew him knew. A powerful obstinacy, a determination relentlessly fixed on its purpose, when roused immovable from its decision. A will possible only to resist by flight. "His father in him," members of the family said. They saw Robert growing more and more like the elder man, but with this difference: Bartholomew Lane cared about the affairs of others, sought to dominate the

circles round him, on every hand to rule. Robert Lane exerted his will only on such matters as directly affected himself. To the elder, autocrat in a small sphere, every little thing had been of paramount importance; but the younger, at home in the great cities of the world, found very few occasions to arouse him. In the plæthora of metropolitan pursuits one's mind becomes divided, one's interest dissipated so that the heart less and less often centres in a purpose.

Robert did not realize the possibilities latent in himself to accomplish an end when that end was threatened by defeat. He knew well enough he seldom failed to get what he wanted, but he underrated his capacity of need, and at the same time, because his desires had never run far outside the pale, he had never felt the stress of his own will striving against itself. He was not one to weigh his own character in a nicely regulated balance. Certain lines of conduct he accepted from the standards of his associates, others fashioned for himself, and within these lived vigorously, unmindful of the effect and with no dissective curiosity in regard to the minute causes of his actions. Had he endeavored to sum himself up at the time it would have been as "a fellow who had made a mess of things, and has got to stand it."

Nevertheless Berenice felt vaguely that in the man which would make her do what he said. In her simplicity she called it his "kindness," and perhaps ignorance may have accidentally judged character aright. It may have been a magnetic power of good will that worked in Lane; at least it drew the girl to him, and brought her under the influence which was to weave her life's web strangely of hemp and golden tissue.

II

Next morning the guest made no appearance. And when the stolid German, who waited on his temporal needs, came to gather up the fragments, Lane sent her to enquire for the girl, but all he gathered of their interview was a muttered "Ach du lieber Gott!" as the woman went out with the tray.

For himself he found the little stranger in such condition as might be expected after much exposure. A touch of fever flushed her face, for which a simple remedy, with rest and sleep and quiet, seemed the thing. In answer to his few mild questions as to the whereabouts of her friends, at first she only shook her head and, seeing the fresh excitement in her eyes kindled by an effort to ex-

plain, for he could not easily understand her speech, he refrained from further discussion at the time, although he began to be concerned about her, and dismayed at the predicament in which he found himself, being unable to call a physician without advertising the girl's presence in his apartments, and also out of consideration for her, unwilling to increase the malady by harassing interviews.

Several days later he opened the subject again, and now, very patiently and very sweetly, she spoke about herself, appearing so small in the bed, and so young. Robert thought of her and treated her as a child.

"I have no friends." She looked wistfully into his face; then remembering Jasper added, "But one."

"Poor child. Where is the one friend? Did you not come out to anybody?"

"I came all by myself."

"But what did you intend to do? Have you any money?"

"Every body asks me that. Why Signor?" She asked with an uneasy smile, and then pulling a little purse from under her pillow, showed him what Nott had given her. "I have a lot of money — see!"

"It is not much, child, as money goes in America. One needs money here."

"How do you get it?"

"By working, generally; there are other ways, but that is the best. Where did you get it?"

"This was given to me; but I can work for more, at least I think I can. I thought it would be enough for years." She gazed ruefully at the few dollars, and Lane could not help smiling over the cautious exactness of her speech in contrast to her helpless ignorance of things practical.

"Why did you not go to a hotel since you had money?"

"I promised not to go to hotels; but, what are they?"

Partly to amuse her, and as well as his limited knowledge of the language permitted, he explained the sleeping and eating accommodation for strangers in a city, finishing with, "I will take you to see one some day;" then stopped, surprised at his own interest.

But she demurred. "I promised not to go with anybody. I did not know about hotels,— and it was so cold."

"Poor little wanderer! You had a bad time of it! And there is no one to whom to send, no one who will be expecting you?"

She shook her head.

"So you came out to conquer America quite alone? What a great undertaking for a little girl! And no friends but one, in Italy."

"And you." Berenice added, looking at him confidently from her pillow.

Robert smiled. He was immensely pleased by the girl's simplicity and innocence, which led her to speak in perfect trust. As a child who puts its hand into that of a grown up, strange person, saying "Take me home," the little lady quietly rolled all her cares on to his shoulders with the claim of friendship. No artful charm could have been so well calculated to win this man, who craved responsibility and affection, his cup being of both quite bitterly empty.

In that "making a mess of things," he had visions of having missed the joys and cares of the human lot. Lane was vigorously human. Made to cherish, support and re-create, he stood alone, terribly conscious of his isolation. And when Berenice addressed him so in faith, he felt a tug at his heart that made him strangely happy.

Robert left his guest, fearful of tiring her, and going into the studio began to pull his canvases about, looking at old beginnings, and with dissatisfaction pondering current work. All the time

he had been talking with Berenice a new idea kept running in his head. He uncovered and set in place the side panels of a reredos, put away some weeks earlier for need of a model. In the angels' faces Lane wanted a something he could no where find. Without exactly forming the thought in words he knew the certain spiritual expression he desired, and was on the lookout for it, but vainly so. The spiritual seemed dead among the youths and maidens of New York.

The artist had hunted in ever likely and unlikely place; had kept his eyes on the faces of marshalled maidenhood that walked from seminaries, inadequately guarded by a mistress in the rear; had made a round of vaudevilles and choruses. And with a desire to leave no stone unturned, on the night he found Berenice, he had even plunged into the vortex of social life, coming off as unsuccessfully as he expected.

But that morning on the face of the little red-headed girl in bed, he had seen for one fleeting second just the expression he wished. If he could persuade her to sit, and could only catch it, the result, he felt, would be a magnificent triumph in art. He stood before the unfinished panels mentally fitting Berenice into the vacant places. The red hair too, although he had not designed it so,

would be a glorious Rubenesque touch,— challenging his colour scheme a very little — and what a splendid effect the whole group would make in place behind the altar!

The painter in Lane now dominated every other feeling. The greatest masterpieces have ever been created brushless, on untouched canvas, and as he stood before the half finished picture, the artist's spirit soared to an imaginative zenith, marvelous in colour and design. Oh, to be able to illuminate the canvas as he saw it, with one superb, entire effort! He knew too well how much the vision of his soul must lose through hours of steady work, pauses, perhaps at critical moments, when the model's endurance flagged; through days of waiting, for drying, for light, for the hundred and one conditions necessary to the technical rendering of a dream.

From where he stood Robert turned to look again, at the splendid decoration by his atelier comrade. Displayed clearly in the morning light, it hung there a rough daub of colour; yet in the rude attempt to express forms, he could see, the more successful attempt to convey revelation of imagined beauty. Was not this the whole desire, in theory and execution, of the tempestuous modern school? To paint that which is as one sees it

— sees it imaginatively. And had not the Frenchman, defying time necessary to forms and methods, in mad haste expressed the soul intensity of his glorious vision? — Painted, indeed, in a fine frenzy! But what a mood to leash and hang upon one's walls!

Lane pushed aside his pallette and with it all thought of work for the day. The artist in him longed to begin the delineation of the angels. He now feared an illness to Berenice as an obstacle to his work and a mortal evil. He listened at the door to the regular heavy breathing of sleep, and walked about and about the studio, but could settle to nothing. His whole mind and heart concentrated in a desire to paint the face of the angel who rested in the inner room. Finally urged by the annoyance of inaction, he took his coat and hat and went out to prowl about the city.

When Robert returned, late in the evening, the girl slept again. He crept into her room, candle in hand, and watched the unconscious face, flushed now, and beautiful in a healthy, robust, ordinary sort of way. He almost waked her, so keen he was to catch again that passing glance of soul detachment in her clear, fine eyes.— Almost, but not quite; arresting himself short of pure selfishness, he returned to the studio, and on the way

out his attention became fixed on the streak of her blue gown hanging by the door. Surely the girl must be an artist herself to have contrived so fine a colour to offset her copper-lustre hair. He touched the soft stuff, and it seemed to cling to his hands as though it had acquired the characteristics of its wearer, dependence, and innocence and purity — for blue is ever pure, chaste, and unprovocative.

The next morning Berenice came stealing out of her room as Lane sat at breakfast. The door opened without sound and he was unaware of her till soft laughter caused him to turn and see her peaking around the screen, dimpling to him like a limpid pool in sunlight; and the coil about his heart drew tighter.

Berenice, thoroughly revived by her long rest, had lost together the effects of her great seasickness and her greater fatigue. Still a little thin and pale, she was again, in spirit, the tender child-woman Margaret found before the Frampani Madonna, and the earnest, delightful little maiden who had, all unconsciously, tormented Jasper Nott from the becoming looseness of his own bath robe.

Lane waved his hand to meet her rougish mood, and pushing a chair around for her called in a

cheerful perversion of her own language, "Come into the grotto, Elf, and have some food."

"I am so hungry, so hungry!" she announced, with the fluency that his speech lacked, skipping around to the far side of the table.

"Aren't you going to say good morning?"

"I've been saying it to your back for ever so long. 'Good morning Signor, good morning Signor' — but you wouldn't look. What are those awfully funny little round black things?"

"Mushrooms. Look good, don't they?" Lane put one on her plate.

"Um — !!" She sank her teeth into the delicious morsel, then made short work of finishing them.

After breakfast Lane took his guest out on the roof-garden and showed her the tall buildings of the city towering above them. Spring had set in late but swiftly, as it does in America, rushing on to summer. They felt mild air and a warmth of sunshine that momentarily transported the girl to her own country; and he saw again the fleeting spirituality light her face and vanish. The artist being less rampant in Lane at the moment, and friendship sharing his emotions, he could bear to realize he must watch and lie in wait for his angel, but was glad to feel assured the look did come,

that he had not imagined the whole thing. He must learn to produce the mood of it as well as interpret the message.

"America is not such a bad place after all, is it?"

"I think it is terrible — terrible! I never want to go down into those ugly streets. Let me stay here in the sunshine."

"You shall stay here as long as you like, child, but we will go down and come back. I will take you to parts of the city where it is beautiful — where trees and flowers and birds make a holiday for us in our prison." As he spoke the man realized how much he was counting on taking her about with him; and Berenice danced in delight, clapping her hands.

"It is so diverting to hear the Signor talk! — Shall we go to a garden?"

"Yes,— the park." He smiled, pleased with her frank amusement at his expense.

"Soon?"

"Now, if you like.— No, this afternoon. I remember I have an appointment."

"Oh, it is lovely, lovely! It is heavenly! — And we will hear the birds sing so sweetly —" Suddenly her face fell. "I can't go! Look." She stuck one foot out from under her dress.

"No shoes!" he exclaimed. "Where are they?"

"They won't go on."

Lane, remembering the sodden mass he had removed from her feet, looked grave. A guest without shoes is an undeniable difficulty.

"What a bother! Can't you get them on at all?"

"I'll show you." She rushed off to her room, reappearing with the boots, one in either hand, and sat on the floor of the studio and tried to pull one on; a comically childish effort, and without effect.

"All right, little girl, never mind; we'll get another pair." But such a problem made the man draw his brows together. Now he remembered other shortages in her costume. "What did you do with your hat?"

"I gave it to a woman on the boat, who did things for me. She said I wouldn't be noticed without a hat, and she said it was a sun hat anyway, and not right for New York, and the rain would ruin it. Such a pretty hat! It would have been a pity to spoil it."

"Leech!" He dismissed the perfidy of the stewardess and continued to study the situation, looking down at Berenice, who sat still on the

floor in her stocking feet, looking up at him. Both deep in the puzzle, they were roused by a knock at the door.

"Bother!" Lane exclaimed, "There's the model! Look here, little Berenice, you must run into your room and stay there till I tell you to come out. Do you understand? You are not to come out here again till I tell you."

"Are you going to work?"

"Yes, I'm going to paint, and I mustn't be disturbed."

"Would I disturb you if I was as quiet as quiet? — I'd love to see you make a picture." She sprang to her feet, intensely enthusiastic, intensely alive.

"You will see me some day, but not now." In his desire to get her away quickly his voice sounded harsh even to himself, and he could not yet pick and chose his words in Italian. This was a strange model of whom he knew nothing, and he did not want her to see the girl. The knock came again, more insistent, so he hurried Berenice off. Wanting to be firm he was brutal.

"Quick! Away with you!"

With a grieved face she ran at once to her own room. She had known solitary confinement as punishment of her naughtiness at Santa Maria,

and could only make this a penance. She heard voices, one a loud, unlovely female voice, and a moment later Robert came in with a great pile of books in his arms.

"Here are some things to look at while you wait.— I'm sorry, little girl," he added, seeing her unhappy face.

"Are you vexed about the shoes?" she asked timidly.

"The shoes — vexed?" Light began to dawn. He understood she fancied herself in disgrace, and laughed. "No, no, child! I don't want the woman to see you, that is all."

"You're not angry — really?"

"Never less so."

Berenice touched his hand gently, shyly, yet confidently. "I'm glad. I thought you were angry. Does the lady help you work — couldn't I help?"

"Yes, she helps, in a way, and some day you will. I must go now." He lingered. "There are a lot of pictures in the books.— You won't be lonely?"

The girl smiled at him brightly. "I don't mind waiting if you are not angry." And she sat down immediately and began to look at the top magazine as though to prove her sincerity.

While painting Lane thought over the matter of the shoes. He could not take Berenice out in her stocking feet to buy them, and he was at a loss whom to send. Frau Gratz was clearly impossible, and it never occurred to Lane to go himself. But he looked once and again at the model with an eye for characteristics other than artistic. Could she be trusted with a purse? The woman was not a studio habitué but had been discovered by him in a chorus and, eager to make a little extra money, had easily been persuaded to sit. The artist, familiar with many types, decided that, in her own way, she was not a bad sort, and at the end of an hour had made up his mind to try her.

"All right for today," he said, laying his brushes on a standing pallet.

"What are you trying to hand me?" she objected. "Two hours it was to be, and it's not worth coming up for one."

"Don't be afraid," he said, good humoredly. "I am going to pay you for two hours. But I want you to do something else for me now."

"I haven't any kick coming then." She rose and stretched her cramped limbs. "Nothing could be much worse than this dummy act."

"I want you to go out and buy some shoes —

women's shoes, about your size, and a hat — and gloves," he added.

The model burst at once into a loud laugh. If Lane harboured any idea of making an excuse for his purchases, he dismissed it at once, his accomplice being sure of her own interpretation.

"I'd never have thought it of *you!*" she cried. "But you're all the same. If it isn't one of us it's another! I can just tell you though, it's a queer girl will be best pleased to have things got this way."

Robert could not afford to show annoyance, needing her assistance. Beside, the rallying was intended all in good part, so he left it without contradiction.

"What sort of a hat?" she asked, pinning on her own tawdry creation, and thereby awakening a sudden horror in the aesthete.

"Not like that!" he said hastily, and stopped, fearing he had been too abrupt again — no doubt she thought it a very fine hat.

"Bless my scented soul, no!" the woman finished for him, undismayed by such broadside criticism. Then she winked at him, a long deliberate wink. "I understand. Modest. The real lady sort! Take it any place, and all that. What color?"

"To go with a blue dress and red hair." Lane felt like a school-boy caught red-handed stealing apples, and began to dread the astonishing perspicacity of this very unusual young woman, who whistled at his reply.

"Sounds like the leading part, for fair! I'll make a break for a brown one. Couldn't get a bishop to wink an eyelash in brown. Always safe as a church! That's why we professional girls never touch the color. It's no use for advertising and we've got to put up a good front."

"Yes, yes. Buy a brown one! It must be brown!" hastily interposed the man, with relief.

"I'll just find a little daisy. Suit her ladyship to a T. Never you fear. Put up the dough and I'm off."

"They cost a lot, don't they? How much do you need?"

The girl guffawed again. "An open purse, eh? My word, you must have it bad! And wonder of wonders the man is green! Leave it to me and I'll deliver the goods; I'm not the worst at a bargain. And you needn't be afraid I'll light out with the tin. Honest to God, I'm pure."

"Get something you like for yourself too," Lane instructed, as he handed over the money.

"Thanks. You're a clean sport all along the line, and I'll not split on you. Mum's the word!"

While he waited for the chorus girl's return Robert Lane ran her last remark over and over in his mind. She was a good fellow, that woman, and to be trusted, living up to her sense of honour. Whatever the limitations of her sort and class, at least the petty leakage of confidences, the jealousies and the tattle of small gossip were not among them. Perhaps great sins give the mind a broad horizon as great deeds of virtue. Lane certainly could think of no woman in his own world to whom he would have entrusted a secret errand, except, he made one reservation, his cousin Margaret le Hunt, whom he had not seen for a very long time.

III

In the afternoon Robert took Berenice to Central Park, which proved so successful an outing that they repeated it many times. It was a gala day for the Italian girl when Lane announced from the roof garden suitable weather for this expedition. She loved it better than any of their other haunts, and all smiles and lovely impatience to be gone, could hardly wait the hour appointed

when the cab whizzed them from the door up the magic length of Fifth Avenue, to the garden of delight. Sometimes it carried them past the walls of the great museum palace, to the upper end, but from the park gates they always walked, chumming together, loitering on shady benches, smelling the flowers they might not pick, and disporting themselves generally like two simple, happy children. In answer to Berenice's open grieving because she was not allowed to gather the blossoms, Robert explained that the place belonged to all the people not to any one of them; and she accepted the lesson in the rights of ownership, with a sigh, for she could not altogether grasp the thought. At Santa Maria the garden had belonged to all, yet she had been welcome to armfuls from its lovely wealth.

To make up for this privation Lane bought huge bunches of flowers, which Berenice delighted to arrange about the studio, revolving meanwhile this and other questions in puzzled wonder. At first her undeveloped sense was only able to stagger from one problem to another amidst the maze of new facts and emotions crowding on her. The cloister training had not encouraged question asking, nor was Robert, with his brilliant, quick intelligence, a fit person to undertake the continual

patient explanation she needed. His answers to her tentative enquiries either went away above her head, or fell short in simple inadequacy. He saw accepted modes of thought were unfamiliar to her, but his temperament, naturally too impatient for instructing, was irritated by the limitations of ignorance on both sides. He was hampered by his slight knowledge of her language; nor did they find a better medium in the only other tongue the girl spoke, for the artist's French was ultra modern, of the Quartier. Robert found it easier to look out an old Italian book or two and refresh his memory, than to attempt to teach Berenice English, so from the first they fell into the habit of Italian speech, and he continued it for very love of her personality which breathed afresh in every unamerican trait. Day by day he fed the squirrels with her, coming for pastime to the childish level; but where she could not readily follow it irked him to guide. He did not carry the young mind in return to his heights, so she climbed alone, one deliberate step at a time, to a rudimentary knowledge of the world in which she lived.

Sometimes Lane wearied of the Park and they sought the Drive, sitting high on the green terrace, from below which the mighty river spreads the splendid invitation of her calm bosom. Boats of

all shapes and sizes moved upon its surface, but the two were well content to watch these pass their up and down without challenge of curiosity. Berenice could think here as she had often thought brooding over the sea view at Santa Maria. She dreamed of Italy, but to Lane's half teasing question of her will to leave America, made always a firmly negative reply. And with her "I am happy," he was reassured.

He did not insist on the girl's history or worry her for details. It was enough that she had neither parents nor friends. Sometimes she talked of Santa Maria, the convent in south Italy which had been her home, but through that limit of speech he missed much of what she told him in the first few weeks. His own past having been sad and wasted he wished to put it all aside, to live in the present, and accepted her as a little playmate sent from some exquisite solitude to fill his empty life.

Berenice had not forgotten the children of the world. Once she spoke about them to him, but he did not realize her deep intention and failed to understand.

"Children! Are there not enough children here?" He replied gaily, indicating the long string of perambulators and nurses that wound out of sight around the favorite bend of the path.

"I mean the hungry, cold, little children; where are they? Where can I find them?" she urged.

"Nobody could be cold today, child, soon we will be too hot! But this is a perfect spring day. What put the thought into your head? I cannot allow you to spoil this lovely day by sad thoughts. See if you can persuade that big fellow to come nearer." And Lane, seeking to divert her, pointed to a fat grey squirrel who sat impudently eyeing them a few feet away.

She said no more of her mission, feeling he was not the one to help her in such an undertaking. And she judged rightly. Like many an aesthete, giving himself entirely to the worship of the beautiful, Robert could not endure the unlovely about him, nor to be brought into contact with depressing evidences of want. A generous man, his hand ever in his pocket to relieve distress, he instinctively made the organized charities his agents. The quickness of his sympathy too rendered the sight of suffering unendurable. Lane could not pass a beggar in the street without feeling, not only pity for his destitution, but a positive pain at the spectacle of his unwashed, hideous condition, assuredly never felt by the mendicant himself.

The artist was no Utopian. He knew his city

and its unexorcised devils; poverty in loatnsome guise, and vice in her haunts. But it was one thing for him to know it, and quite another for Berenice. His angel, exquisite in every way, must so remain; her thoughts even must not be allowed to veil themselves in dark shadows. Whatever had made her speak of starving children in the middle of their care free, gaily happy promenade he could not imagine, and guessing nothing of her strange design, he sought to change the current of her thoughts by throwing peanuts to a grey squirrel.

Berenice never wavered from the intention of her pilgrimage, but now the joy of life flowed in her young veins and beat in her eager heart. Daily she woke to new interests and daily drank the divine elixir. Sun and summer made a golden path for her to tread, and Robert's growing affection strewed the way with flowers. She did not fight for her former ideals nor experience any conscience searching self reproach. The transition from the old life to the new was so sudden and complete no spiritual call to arms had sounded. The convent life and the grey routine of days seemed like some former soul state, an isolated existence receding in the mists; the pilgrimage, when it came to her mind, presented itself a part of vague futurity, as ultimate marriage may hover

in the consciousness of a débutante while tripping the measure of her first dance. Past and future were neither, at the time, very real to Berenice, for the present claimed her with an appeal to nature too utterly human to be denied.

With a childish lack of consideration, truly delightful to the lonely man, Berenice had established herself in Robert's quarters and continued his guest; or, more nearly a member of his family, without the slightest discussion of ways or means. Her needs having always been supplied the idea of self support never dawned on her, nor the value of money. When he took her to the shops she did not ask for prices but would have ordered wildly in delight over the beauty of things had not his voice restrained her. A word was sufficient. His quiet "I prefer this," never failing to turn her whole desire toward the indicated treasure, and her answering "Then I like it too," making the article a possession.

Time passed quickly. The hot weather found the angels of the reredos nearly completed, and Berenice an absolutely established part of the studio life. She had wound herself into the artist's heart till he knew every fleeting expression of her face, every graceful, individual turn in her movements, every soft inflection of her voice, and

every vagrant fancy of her mind, ne would have said. Thought of the place without her must have struck him dumb in aching dread, but he did not think of such a possibility. He accepted his little companion as a gift of the gods, and he loved her, the child returning his affection as all young things love one whose care is for them.

More and more intense grew the heat as the sun beat down all day on the stone city. Robert began to think of migrating to some quiet place to get away from it, but he wanted to finish his reredos first. In the evenings he carried their chairs out to the roof-garden and sat with Berenice under the star lit sky, almost tropical in its intense dead beauty; and knew himself a happier and more contented man than he had ever been before.

Sometimes he took the child's hand in his and felt the quick return grasp, and let the knowledge of her sweet reliance on him hang in his heart like a choice perfume of night blooming lilies. He sat thinking only of her, planning for her, for their twin future, while Berenice rested silent, leaning a little on his arm, thinking too, seeking to reconcile the magnificent blossom of life with the starved cellar root of a convent training. Her thoughts were wildly mixed, fancies following one another in a weird pageant, sometimes re-

viewing the day's delights and again turning to the future and separation, for thought she had never said to herself "I must leave him," everything was touched with the unreality of transient things.

So these two, man and girl, reposed after the day in the tranquil, silent companionship of the night watches. And while the little breezes wafted a gentle current in the evening air, the noises of the city died away, and tall buildings shrouded themselves in darkness one by one, till only God's lights hung above them, both were happy. Yet each in much was stranger to the other's thought.

VII

THE FLESH

I

On that special Thursday morning the little accidents which were to fix the destiny of two souls, Berenice had no intention of disobeying. It was a morning like others, bright and hot, and she had gone after breakfast to water the flowering plants on the roof-garden. Poor boxed things! The instinctive mother in her liked to minister to their dependent need of care, and this had become a self imposed task of her daily round.

When the model's knock sounded Lane called out, and the little would-be gardener had only time to drop her can in the middle of the artificial Eden and scamper off to her own room.

This seclusion of Berenice during the model's sittings had sprung from Lane's first order into an unwritten law. Why, neither of them could have told. The girl continued to do so unquestioningly, in her eagerness to anticipate his wishes, and Rob-

ert had never checked her small sacrifice, although he knew no reason why the girls should not meet. He felt that the boisterous, flashy Gabrielle March, as his model's name appeared on the programme, when she was lucky enough to have it appear at all, would be an unlikely person to attract or influence the gentle Italian, and could have little fear of their becoming intimate, since neither spoke the other's language. Besides, he knew Gabrielle now, a harmless, good hearted, hard working girl, coarsened by contact with the rude environments of her profession, alarmingly familiar with immoral life — yet not of it, turning a coldly safe, if hardly deaf ear, to the usual insinuatingly complimentary beginnings of the voice of seduction.

"I don't tolerate any softsoaping over me! That sort of thing does for a girl pretty quick, professionally or the other way. Champagne and late hours don't help one's singing any more than one's standing.— And I'm in this business for life. Besides — look at the men! The sort of men that hang about the stage door! It's the slipper they need, and sucking bottles, most of them. Youth's too all fired precocious in the region of the theaters."

There was no contradicting her crudely em-

phatic statements, calculated to discourage an amorous tendency in her associates, the painter thought. She showed intelligence and spirit in this and other ways, — and yet Robert allowed Berenice to go to her room. For one thing he could work better if there were no third person to distract, never so little, his own attention or the model's. His devotion to the reredos had become an obsession. Working feverishly, hour after hour, he had on the previous morning completed the head of the chorus girl, converted to a wonder of unemotional, impersonal chastity, befitting the beauty of the Madonna. The face of Berenice in several of its changing moods was grouped about, and only the child in the mother's arms remained now, a roughly sketched impression.

Lane, at a loss where to look for the infant model, feared provoking delay again, and in his anxiety to finish the painting made more difficulty about it than necessary. He had pressed Gabrielle into the service of search. And she willingly agreed to do her utmost, assuring him with a smile:

"Kids aren't absolutely unknown in our locality. Trust it to me! Why any of the proprietors of a go-cart should be tickled to get a dollar out of the nuisance."

"We must have one not too young, you know, and not too old." Lane counselled in perplexity, running his hands through his hair.

"No kick coming against a Jew baby — seeing it's a religious picture? All bunkum, I think, a bluff game! — But I'll tell you sitting here pretending to be the Virgin Mary is a whole lot easier money than hollerin' in a chorus all night, very on the half shell, with a demon of a cyclone playing through the wings.— Good-bye, see you tomorrow — and maybe I'll bring the kid."

And sure enough, to Robert's delight, the girl appeared with a lumpy bundle in her arms, bearing a strong human suggestion about its lumpishness.

"Got one! Not a bad line either," she panted on the doorstep, flushed by the climb, and looking oddly out of keeping with her burden. With difficulty the amateur nurse undressed the boy. It was a ticklish job at best, and a touch of self consciousness over the man's watching increased her awkwardness. She turned the child over and over on her knee a great many more times than necessary, stuck all the pins in the front of her dress, and committed other outrages against the order of such matters; but in time she succeeded in reducing the babe to a natural state of nakedness.

"There you are, my chuck!" she cried triumphantly.

"Not a bad youngster," the artist agreed, standing off to regard him with an appreciative eye as a model, and then essaying more personal acquaintance by feeling the fat limbs between thumb and finger, for all the world like a housewife choosing a fowl.

"He's a beauty! Not that I'm a connoisseur, like you," she added with a wink. "Mother's stuck on the little fellow, but his father doesn't care a rap. Chuck, chuck!" Gabrielle snapped her fingers, with her best dramatic air before the widely opened, solemn eyes, but failed to get the smile she played for.

"Why, the young guy don't care a penny for the footlights! What a model boy! — Shall we get to work?" And so saying she tried to assume an attitude suitable for the Madonna group.

"That won't do!" Lane decreed promptly. "Too stiff."

"How shall I hold him then? We're up against it sure!"

"I don't know — comfortably."

"Easy enough said," objected Gabrielle, a comical vision of helpless concern, with the naked baby in her arms.

"Of course it's easy! Perfectly easy! — Hundreds of women are doing it all the time! — No — you haven't got it yet."

"Oh, is it easy! Just you come and try. Here take the kid, and show me."

A naked, fat baby is not the simplest thing to handle. It looks easy, but as Gabrielle exhorted — just you try! Lane advanced bravely, he grasped the wriggling little eel in his two hands, but when it came to lifting his courage failed.

"No," he said quickly. "No, I'd be sure to drop the little chap.— You'd better keep him. Look, there now! — He doesn't like me."

The pink face changed suddenly, alarmingly, from dimples to creases. Spell-bound with horror they watched these deepen and develop in unmistakable symptoms.

"My scented soul! If it cries we're done!"

"Do you suppose I hurt the little thing?"

The duet of remorse and dismay expressed their feelings, while, at the moment, the sound of a bell simultaneously diverted the three minds from a crisis; and the man and woman became conscious of the open door, and the smart groom on the threshold whose imperturable gaze was fixed on the incongruous domestic tableau. Being, however, that most expensive importation, a well-trained

English servant, this model of all the liveried virtues allowed no hint of his surprise to play across his features. Stoical at the dictates of his professional dignity, and sphinx-like by habit, for him humor did not exist. He delivered his message in mechanical, flat directness, and waited.

"Bother!" exclaimed Lane shutting the door, and shutting out the proudest possession of Mrs. Allenby-Harte. "I've got to go down! Sends word she's waiting in the carriage and there's no way around it. She wants to entice me into looking at bogus masterpieces, I'll be bound. Hang the woman! There's no end to her! — I won't be a minute!" he called back. "See what you can do with him while I'm gone."

Her professional pride now awakened to play up to the caste, Gabrielle determined to master the new role, and made several quick essays into experimental attitudes. She had forgotten, or never thought of that deadly implement, the pin, in the front of her dress, but soon her poor little co-operator in artistic effect had cause to remember it. And immediately he gave vent to a loud piercing scream.

The sound, unfamiliar but unmistakable, fell on the startled ears of Berenice as she was about to remove the hat she had worn on the roof-gar-

den, the same modest brown hat purchased by Gabrielle. With hands raised she stood petrified in astonishment — the voice of a bambino in the studio! The voice of a child in distress! The rallying cry of her pilgrimage! — It came again in terrible sturdy vigor, and without thought of law or order the girl dashed into the other room.

Before her on the model's throne sat a strange woman, arrayed in cheap finery, red faced and alarmed, gazing helplessly, Berenice thought unkindly, at the screaming naked rebel on her knee.

"Brutta donnaccia!" cried the Italian rushing to the centre of the situation and snatching the yelling infant. "What have you done to it? — There, there, carrissimo." Her voice fell to a wheedling croon; by instinct she knew how to hold him safely, comfortably, as her beloved Madonna held the Christ.

"There, there — my blossom, my sweet, my darling loveliness," and much more in honeyed language she purred to the babe, cuddling him between bosom and cheek, and swaying her body in gentle motion.

Gabrielle, too much amazed by the suddenness of the attack to protect her lap from pillage, was not sure whether the turbulent rescuer came from inside or outside; but immediately recognizing

the hat, she burst into such a gust of hilarity that both stopped to stare at her open eyed, the child in wide wonder, Berenice in a superb passion of anger. For she mistook the mirth of this gaudy woman to be derision of the child's pain, and stood with him clasped in her arms, gazing over him at Gabrielle, hatred in her face, as primitive as the savageness of a beast whose young is threatened; while the older woman sat back convulsed in laughter. So Lane found them.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, gazing from one to the other. "Berenice, you here!"

"Oh, my stars!" The woman gasped, wiped her eyes, and began to laugh again; while for answer, Berenice nodded a sternly accusing head in the other's direction.

"She hurt the baby.— She is bad, bad and cruel! She's a wicked woman!"

"Oh, no she isn't. She didn't mean to hurt him. Why she wouldn't hurt a fly!" And to Gabrielle.

"What happened? What is it all about?"

"It's the hat! My scented soul! What a daisy show down!"

Lane smiled, looked at Berenice, and laughed too.

The girl only caught one English word she understood, but it was sufficient. She knew the

cruel woman was laughing at her now, and making Lane laugh at her.

"Take it off," she commanded angrily, turning to him, having no hands for the task.

"Don't be silly, Berenice. There's no trouble about the hat, nothing the matter with it.— A very pretty hat," Robert said in a mollifying voice, going round behind her to unpin it, and shaking his head at Gabrielle over the flowered crown.

The incorrigible sport winked comprehension back at him. "All right," the wink said. "Leave it to me. I promised not to split on you and I won't." And at the same time her voice took up the reassurance. "It's a lovely hat.— the right colour — eh? And the lady's a fine nurse. My stars! I was scared stiff when he began that hollerin'. I thought I had about done for the kid."

Lane explained Gabrielle's words, and Berenice, doubtful but appeased, sat down with the baby and began to coax him into play, the unsuccessful nurses looking on in wonder.

"Say! Ain't she just too cute with the little fellow! Ain't she got it to a T.!" And it was Gabrielle who in her blunt way first expressed the man's thought.

"That's the style. There's the real mother for

you! She can hold him for his picture, all right."

"The real mother." Yes, undeniably, by instinct mother, and perfect inspiration for the motive of divine love — and to Lane — revelation.

He set about painting without further delay, but with only a divided mind's half interest in the work. As when a blind man is suddenly gifted with sight, Robert's world blazed into a glorious vivid place of imagination made possible and real; strange visions he did not at once completely understand. But he saw too, beyond the immediate wonder, that terrible black cloud of heart-sickness, receding and receding, drawing itself together, and rolling away, like a storm marshalling its forces in retreat. And the longer he worked with his eyes fixed on the tender group of mother and child, the farther it seemed to roll.

"Fools and blind! Fools and blind! Fools and blind!" The words beat in Lane's head and throbbed a refrain. A fool and blind he had been, till a tangible vision being granted him, he saw unsuspected beauty and knew his own heart. So he continued to paint that he might satisfy his delight in looking at the visible revelation— Berenice, a child in his thought, a woman in fact,

strangely and sweetly transformed to a rapture of maternity before his ravished eyes.

Quite simply and sincerely, Robert Lane had made the young Italian the object of his affectionate adoption. He had grown to love her smiling face, her gracious ways, her gentle timidity, and half shy, half coy reticence. Her presence rounding out the emptiness of his life into contentment, gratitude flowed out to her in care. As a man he had acted with a fair minded, pure intention toward the girl, and now he saw the rose blown and knew it above all things fresh and very beautiful and full of fragrance; for the first time Robert saw his little guest a lovely woman. He had experienced happiness in loving the child, Berenice, and now the need of happiness grown strong, lifted its head in answer to the call, gazed on the phenomena and trembled — hardly in expectation, but in self knowledge. To give may be more blessed, but to receive is very sweet, to desire natural, and Robert's longing for affection had survived the drought of years. His pulses beat a new rhythm and the hand holding his brush blundered in its delicate task.

Robert Lane had hoped to see his own children in their mother's arms. Now all that longing and the love held back, rushed to his heart and brain,

an impulse, a mad surcharge, a wild torrent, rising flood-like, carrying everything before it, leaving of all the world only Berenice and her chubby lapful. The high water mark of the surging tide dimmed his eyes and threatened to overpower the habit of his self control; and in sore need to cover his emotions from the too quick perception of the astute Gabrielle, keenly alive, like all her class, to manifestations of feeling, he brought the sitting to an abrupt close.

"What, so soon!" cried both girls.

"And we were so happy," protested Berenice, who could not be persuaded to give the child up. Only after a most solemn promise to bring him next day, would she allow Gabrielle to take him away. Having dressed the infant reluctantly but more deftly than Gabrielle had undressed him, she put the darling into the other's arms with a dozen injunctions, taking him again for one last little cuddle, and then again for just one more, and finally running all the way down stairs to bid farewell at the door.

"Tomorrow!" she cried, bursting into the studio. "Tomorrow, she will bring him again — the sweet loveliness! Ah, tomorrow!" And she ran as usual to the sink to help Robert wash brushes. He would not let her put the sticky,

alkaline mass of soft soap on her delicate hands, but she delighted to rinse and dry them, making a game of her ability to keep two departments of labour ahead of his one. To do this she was obliged to stand close beside Lane in a space he had contrived for the easy accommodation of himself alone. Today all her talk was of the bambino, of his amusing ways, of the strange lady and how she had been cross with her at first. Berenice now laughed heartily over her own mistake, and as she laughed and talked, leaning far over to dip the short handled brushes in the running water, Lane's very soul went out in love to her. She who had been little mother was so young, so prettily kindled with enthusiasm over her new playmate, so much and so dearly a child herself, he felt he could love her in all ways at once; as a husband loves a wife, as a man loves the mother of his children, and as a father loves his child.

For a moment she was again wholly little girl to him; then, as she stood back with arms extended to keep the splashing water from her dress, and rubbed and rubbed the stubbly brushes in her soft palm, in vigorous imitation of Robert's strong expert movement, he could feel her small shoulder trembling against his own. Conscious of her physical nearness he looked at her remembering

she was the woman too, his doubly precious, perilous delight.— And with the thought he bade her leave him.

"Run away, little girl, and finish watering the flowers. I'll do this."

"But they are almost done! Let me finish."

"It is a hot day, Carrissima, and the posies will miss their drink."

She met his eyes smiling at her as they had never done before, a comprehensive smile, seeming to embrace the whole of her, to penetrate her soul in glowing light, and hold her eyes gazing back into his. This was happiness! Though she could not understand nor speak her thought, but only smiled back at him again. Then a pulse she had not known she possessed, away within her somewhere, began to thrill and flutter like a bird singing without utterance. Lane's smile was incalculable in time, but all the while he held her eyes, that voiceless magic song quivered and fluted, and when he looked away it died at once, and all was very still. The calm in herself, so new, and so entire it felt as death must feel, frightened Berenice. Like a scared wild rabbit she ran away and buried her face in the red gera-

niums on the roof. She felt her cheeks as hot as they, then cold again. What had happened?

The girl did not know. She felt wildly delighted, as though Robert had called her by some wonderful new pet name, the sense of which went beyond comprehension, but there was heaven in the sound of it. And she knew he had called her, yet he had not spoken, no words came to her mind. She tried to remember all of the marvellous moment, so startling and evanescent, but all she could see was his smile, and at the memory the bird in her woke, and trilled again, and died to the scared stillness.

Berenice wondered why the little bird sang at Robert's smile, and thought shyly she would ask him — no, and again yes — perhaps, when they sat in the silent darkness of the roof-garden. They always sat in the roof-garden, but that night, although she coaxed with her most enticing sweetness, she could not persuade him. He had work to do, he said, and settled himself with some papers. She had never known Lane to work at night, and being very stupid all alone, after a dull hour in the garden, she wearied and came down to bed.

The girl crept up behind his chair and peeped over his shoulder. Robert knew she was there.

He felt her nearness to him, and because he felt it sweetly, took no notice of her.

"I'm going to bed.— I'm so lonely without you."

Still the subtle enjoyment of her kept him from speech, kept his eyes on the paper before him, and presently, a little hand stole to his shoulder stroking it down and down, this having grown to be her peculiar habit in certain moods, a pretty habit which pleased the artist. He had likened it to the music of a distant horn blown over water, to the shadow of summer clouds chasing rifts of sunlight across the wheat fields, to the gliding volume of a quiet river and other tender imagery, and indeed it was an exquisitely delicate expression without words. Now it made the blood in his veins run tumultuously. His heart-beat told it was for this he had been secretly waiting, and reason contradicted, arguing otherwise, while he strove with himself to retain his outward calm and to appear natural to the girl.

"Good night," her voice whispered.

"Good night, child," he managed to articulate, not daring to look at her. Every fibre of him yearned for her, and he fought the strong desire of his manhood with his strong will.

Suddenly she put a hand on either side of his face, turning it back and up to her own.

"Hasn't it been a lovely day?" she cried. "Wasn't he a darling bambino?"

The light of excitement shone in her eyes. It was love he saw there. Maybe the love of the child, a passion of motherhood, but it was passion; and with it the man's desire burned to a white heat, consuming his will. With an inarticulate noise Lane sprang up, the chair clattering to the floor. In the instant he stood above the girl, beside himself, blinded, inflamed, his face dull red, his eyes glowing, the breath rasping in his throat. In the instant his hands moved to make her his Berenice vanished, half in laughter, half in tears to her own room, crying good night as she ran. No bird had sung in her trembling to ecstasy, only the feeling of the wild rabbit scared her away.

Robert made no effort to follow. He watched the door close, perhaps the knowledge that it did not lock checked him. Savage, but now controlled, he mechanically lifted the overturned chair and sat in it, with his elbows on the table and his throbbing head clutched in his two hands. So the mad devil went out of him. Will again took command, but in the wake of the demon a legion

of unruly spirits remained to torment the unhappy man.

Self knowledge came to Lane on the heels of the moment's abandon. The tongues of temptation raged in his brain, and amid their babel moderation was well nigh silenced. One after another the voices called, arraying themselves with reason. "You love her, you are able to protect her. She is desirable. She needs only knowledge to make her desirous. She is yours by right, did you not save her from a frozen death? — The woman came and you did not ask her to stay, not even so little. And is not the woman coming to you, yours — for the taking?"

"Take, for she is sweet," prompted the voice. "If you don't you are the greater fool!" it derided.

"If you do you are a blackguard," nagged a still, small voice, opposing itself continuously against the chorus. So they had a sharp bout between them while the man listened to the war they waged, impartial as an umpire, for the contention was not of his volition, but a thing outside, apart. His individuality was a stranger to the controversy, his mood driven hither and thither in their rage, now wildly importunate, now aggressively blasphemous of his better self.

Loudest of all the voices rang out the first voice, calling incessantly, "You love her. You love her. You love her!" Does not love justify its consummation?" questioned vox humana. "And she is more to you than the whole world." And the first voice, impatient of argument, drowned insinuation, with reiteration of the single moving thought — "You love her."

"Does not love spare?" nagged the still, small one. "Spare!" echoed the legion in mockery — "Spare! Spare! A fool's idea! Is it nature's law to spare? — Spare then if you will, instinct shall triumph in the end.— If it is not you, it will be some other. Very shortly, it will be some other." And Lane, groaning, laid his head on his arms, while without cessation, as the tramp of marching men, they carried the merciless conflict through him.

He could see his love as distinctly as though she stood before him, could trace every curve and color of her dear face, hear the timbre of her voice, mark the turn of each familiar movement, feel again her gentle caress on his shoulder. And another would know this? Another share the intimate revelation of her personality, touch her and — no! He would kill his tens of thousands if need be to prevent. Rather let his madness take

its course — than lose these treasures to another. Jealousy now mounted her green banner in the van. Another! That would be it. Some other, a younger man and free would see her, and love and win; for to see her was to love her, and the girl ripe for winning. Robert knew it; had seen it in her face as she bent over him, and he remembered and shook with emotion. Thought became agony. His little Berenice whom he had loved and guarded — would she leave him for that other? Vox humana assured him: "She will; she must do so, if ——"

And he knew his hands were tied. Oh, the agony of it! Tied and knotted in vows of Church and State.— Unalterable law! For though Lane in his daily life was careless to the verge of non-religion, the groundwork of his mental processes remained firmly fixed in the dogmas of the faith wherein he had been educated, that Holy Roman Church whose voice forbade the loosing of his fetters. In bitter despair he groaned aloud, and his spirit was torn. He would fight to the death against that hypothetical other, and as in a nightmare of impossible horror, all the time he warred against his antagonist his arms were bound fast to his sides, so that he was impotent and could only rage — rage — accomplishing nothing. From

the depths of his torture he cried — "Where then is the justice of the strife?" Because he was bound that other would win. Yet he had bound himself, with his own hand, voluntarily. There was equity — "You've made a mess of things and got to stand it."

The plain, straight philosophy of his old verdict brought the man to himself; and now he was alive to take a hand in the argument, he stilled the tumultuous voices by putting out the lights with the intention of going off to his own quarters on the floor below. Instead he strolled out to the roof-garden and in the chair Berenice had recently vacated, gave himself up to reflection.

There in the velvet night, while his cigar burned its fragrance to ash against the heavy smell of blossoms, Lane reviewed his life. For the first time consciously indulging in introspection, bringing the irresponsible cause face to face with the desolating, incalculable effect.

Vividly, as though it had been yesterday, he saw the graduate home from college, an untried, self important, swaggering youth; half shy, half patronizing to the two girl cousins who made his father's house their home. Alternately he was awed to awkward stupidity by Helen's scornful beauty, and his lacerated vanity healed in Peggy's

good cheer and hearty friendliness; like other youths of the town, content to worship Helen from a distance, while he might spend the long days fishing with the jovial younger comrade.

Robert saw again his father's dark face when he ran across Margaret and himself embarking on one of these outings; and lived over the interview to which he had been summoned next day in the book-encrusted solemnity of the Judge's library, an interview in which the name of Peggy was not even mentioned. He had been divided between fear and a great admiration of this grim father who spoke then only of the other girl's attractions, and laughed at the boy's confessed awe of her, rallying him as a faint heart. Who positively and audaciously suggesting to the younger mind the depths of its devotion to the reigning beauty, at the same time instigated his son to win before others, conveying his approval as a father and as guardian, indeed, almost assuring the girl's answer, before the surprised young man had recovered from the thunderbolt of the idea.

From the perspective of years Robert could see he had gone into that stately room an irresponsible, slightly conceited, jolly college boy, and come out of it virtually engaged, and an ambitious man. Even in his unhappiness he could

not refuse a tribute to the astonishing skill of the maneouver. In such manner the old politician ruled his environment, having made himself the terror of three States for nearly forty years. Robert forgave the mistaken judgment, in his admiration for the iron will and the ripe diplomacy of mind which triumphed here as elsewhere, marrying him to Helen in less than three months' time.

Before they were well started on the wedding journey his wife's real character began to be apparent. She did not scold, being too beautifully dignified for shrewishness; and there was not enough warmth in her to blaze. Lane never really knew how she conveyed her disapproval, how the wrong was established, but, whatever transpired, all the blame was quietly rolled unto his shoulders. Petty inconveniences and unavoidable or accidental troubles arose from his mismanagement. If it was wrong it was Robert, came first, and very soon the second step followed — If it was Robert, it was wrong. Having rebelled from time to time against the injustice, he finally learned to accept it in silence, and knew his wife incurably selfish.

When, on their return from Paris, Lane hunted up his college friends, graduated like himself into

the Benedict class, becoming an intimate of their homes, comparatively the need and failure of his own impressed him. He wanted joy to dance for him on light wings, he wanted children to tease his quiet with a hundred questions, his wife to bridle to sharp edges of a delicious jealousy. Despairing of affection, he still waited for the interest of a younger generation in his home: waited for years — till he discovered Helen's real attitude toward the question. He turned sick now at the memory of their interview, when for the first time they had met as wife and husband — fully revealed each to the other, the real woman and the real man.

Helen's flat refusal to assume responsibility made the final breach between them. Filled with disgust, loathing her cowardice and bitter in his frustrated hope, he left her. The relief was mutual; and neither wishing to resume relationship, it had not been found necessary to legalize the separation.

From that time there had been nothing to remember but increasing loneliness. Lane grew to hate the homes of his friends. Jealousy of their happiness alternated with mistrust, as he questioned the truth of it, seeing again his own dinner

table to the very last smirking a falsehood of harmony for the benefit of the invited guests.

So Robert had fallen out of the old set and was commonly spoken of as an embittered man. And now when he thought of Berenice, and possibilities made impossible, the vitriol of the past flooded his soul. He cursed fate! Cursed his youth, his folly, his ignorance, his conceit! And walking up and down the little square of roof, raged against heaven and earth. Hatred of the cold woman who stood between him and a full life, was one with hatred of the religion which bound him to her. His mind threw itself into the vortex of civil and moral law, arguing nature against custom, love against duty, the force of primitive emotions against all traditional standards. Passion no longer assailed the man. He was cold and clearly deliberate in thought, and his mood more dangerous in that reason sought to justify the forbidden. While, thus overwrought, he strove to find a system in the chaos, the words beat in his brain — "It can't be done. It can't be done!" And all the time he knew this true. To hate one's bonds is not to loose them; to deny a religion is not to unlearn the principle. Berenice, life and the right to live again in procreation, wasted their force against the relentless

strength of that other position.— "what God hath joined." — With Job, he almost cursed God.

Abruptly Lane turned his back on the night, and going to the studio, pushed open the door of the girl's room, and threw the light of a reading lamp slanting across the bed. Whether in confident strength, to prove temptation no temptation, or in evil, prompting desire to the accomplishment of its own end by rousing the demon to a fury beyond all power to hold? But the child sleeping with tossed curls, flushed face and parted lips, one hand beneath her cheek, melted his hardness. The man stood at the door watching but did not cross the threshold; he even drew back lest his foot profane the holy ground of innocence. It seemed as if a tangible presence withheld him; but how he longed to touch her, only to touch her, to bend over and inhale the sweet fragrance of the blown-rose. As he watched his heart cried like a weary child, and the waves of an ocean of loneliness rolled over him, engulfing his soul. He struggled and sank under it, down, down, till fathoms deep in bitterness he seemed to float. Berenice lay sleeping there also, he could see her — a Venus unborn entranced in the heart of a pearl; but he was alone, terribly,

terribly, helplessly alone; and the currents carried him past and away from Berenice, farther and farther away.

Robert could stand the agony no longer, and rousing himself, dashed out the light and the vision. He leaned his head against her door post crying desolately till the violence of his sobbing must have troubled the girl's dreams, for she moved restlessly in the darkness. At that the man stifled his emotion. He waited to see if he had roused her, each moment a concentrated eternity of waiting, then choking back the sound in his throat, stole from the open door and threw himself on a couch, where he slept heavily until morning.

II

The sittings with Berenice, Gabrielle and the child became the daily order. Lane, bound to finish the reredos before he left town, slaved at it early and late, while Berenice, always delighted to have the boy in her arms, sat untiringly. Gabrielle brought the child and remained throughout the time. Lane had arranged it so. He was a changed man; neither of the girls understood him. Instead of the old bon camaraderie, he

remained stern and silent, working feverishly, with a haggard, ill look about the face bespeaking physical pain. Berenice remarked it again and again in gentle, grave concern; and Gabrielle boldly advised him to leave painting and be off out of the heat; but even she, with her over intelligent eyes, failed to see the real seat of the trouble.

To Berenice this was a splendid time. She throve in the heat, her heart wrapped itself around the child, she delighted to see Gabrielle, a Woman's companionship pleasing her, and they became friends, though conversation continued difficult. At times the chorus girl essayed a word or two in Italian, to the amusement of the others; but Berenice rarely understood anything of her English, and Robert conducted the conversations as interpreter, with improvisations of his own.

The real friendship of the girls took root and flourished from a kiss Berenice impulsively placed one morning on the other's powdered cheek. Greatly to Lane's delight, Gabrielle blushed, positively blushed! Although she looked sheepishly at him, and winked to relieve her embarrassment, it was not hard to see she liked it. She hoped Berenice would do it again and to that end made little overtures of friendship in her own way. So

presently it became a habit for Gabrielle to receive her kiss when she received the precious bundle in her arms and said good-bye. At these departures Berenice officiated wonderfully. Two babies, Gabrielle called them, and Lane acquiesced, knowing better. But he would not allow his mind leisure to dally in such treacherous fields of knowledge.

Robert drove at his work, and at last the day came when he laid aside his brushes in the middle of the forenoon. The reredos was finished. The three models gazed at their own faces, feeling it a deeply serious moment, until the babe relieved the tension with a gurgle.

"So that's all you think of my work, you young rascal! Find it funny, do you?"

Then the girls ventured question and remark, as intelligent, perhaps, as remarks customarily made to the artist of his work, but as a committee of criticism they could hardly have been counted a success. The value of the canvas, Gabrielle frankly pronounced a mystery to her; she knew more of scene painting. And it was wonderfully a mystery to Berenice. As she studied the panel, religious superstitions came back to her in unreality. Those angels with her own face seemed little short of blasphemy. Robert told her it

was always so, the Madonna and saints always taken from a model — and she had believed them a divine inspiration. Ecclesiastical painting fell from its high estate. On the whole Berenice was rather more shocked and troubled by the completed reredos than pleased.

So much she found was far from her idea of it. America — how vastly different from the world she had imagined! Her pilgrimage — so strangely removed in fact from the quick, successful, triumphal pilgrimage she pictured. And the saints? — if she could so easily be turned into a group of angels, and Gabrielle into a Madonna, what were the saints she worshipped? Had her beloved, holy Mother of God at Santa Maria been another Gabrielle? Could the Church be different also, from her conception, and the teaching of the Church?

She felt the vague misgiving, the helplessness which assails a devout soul when its faith is first aroused to question. Religion, the positive limit of her universe, the absorbing ritual of life, steadfast as God, fixed as the rock of a sea wall, now trembled slightly, as though it might be a curtain only, imitating a wall, presently to be drawn back revealing other worlds. Berenice stored all these things in her mind, pondering them in the

dark hours on the roof-garden. And much of life she marvelled at, and much failed to unravel, as her poor little awakening intellect struggled alone out of the morass of early training, bound to beat upward to the truth through bitter tempests of experience.

Lane knowing his work good, and hearing the young critics from their simple faith in him pronounce it so, was for the moment satisfied with the result; and he was glad the thing was done. To-morrow he would take Berenice away from the city to some cool retreat. The moment had come for parting. Gabrielle kissed her friend for the first time, awkwardly, shyly, but the latter hardly noticed the advance, alive only to the final loss of the laughing boy in her arms. Giving vent to her sorrow she hugged him till both wept, and at a sign from Lane, Gabrielle without more ado carried the child off.

Berenice dried her tears but she could not still her aching heart. It was she now who felt alone, quit alone, the studio seemed vast and empty. Lane occupied himself with the recently finished canvas, studying it from every point; and later went out to make the final preparations for their journey. The girl was left to wander fitfully from one pastime to another. All her little things had

to be packed neatly in the new trunk, but even this fascinating novelty failed to hold her long. It was too hot, she told herself, she would work tomorrow. And certainly it was hot enough to justify idleness. But her sad mood was not due to the heat, and the sense of loss persisted and would not be shaken off.

As she thought of the tomorrow without her beloved baby, and the next day, and all the following days, Berenice became more and more sad. She did not want to go away and leave her beautiful boy in the hot city. Ah, if she could only have taken him with her! Once she had heard Gabrielle say something in English about a baby of her own. The girl's heart thrilled at the only words she understood — her own. If that darling, splendid bambino had been her own to take away into the heart of the country Robert told her was so beautiful! What happiness! Berenice sighed.

The girl was so sad during dinner, Lane noticed her depression, and went to sit with her on the roof. Not once during the last two weeks had he more than strolled out, or stood smoking in the doorway; but tonight he took his accustomed place, and they sat side by side in the darkness.

Noises of the locality died away one by one,

the distant hum of the city only accentuating the quietness, as the voices of a million insects chorusing shrilly silence a tropical night. Up there on the roof they seemed to be in splendid isolation, they two and the stars. Lane smoked his cigar to the end without a word, but when he tossed it away the motion roused Berenice, and she slipped a hand into his as of old. The man hesitated a moment before taking it. He could hear his heart beating more quickly as he pressed the little palm in his own; and the girl's head sank lower and lower, till he wondered if she slept. No. Presently she moved and sighed.

"Are you tired, little one?"

She shook her head, and silence fell again between and all about them. Then a tear splashed onto Lane's hand.

"Berenice!" He started and put an arm around her, turning her tenderly to look into her face. "Little girl, what is it? Tell me," he gently urged. But the tears only fell faster. "Don't you want to go away tomorrow?"

She shook her head again, in what might have been either acquiescence or dissent, and as she shook it she shook out a sob. Speech would not come, and Lane was terribly distressed. He had never known her to cry before. He fancied she

must be ill, in pain, fatigued with the heat, and was sincerely alarmed for her.

"Tell me, tell me what it is, little one." He drew the girl into his arms and she sobbed out her sad little heart against his breast.

"What is it?" he whispered again.

"I want the baby."

"The baby, Berenice, is that all!"

"I love him.— He's so dear to play with." It was no more than a broken, murmured protest opposed to Lane's tone of relief, and it came between two sobs.

Robert held her so, stroking her unruly hair, and let her cry it out. What to do for her he did not know. For himself a miracle had happened — Berenice was in his arms! Actually there, her warm bosom throbbing against his. A tearful child, to be sure, but still in his arms. His mind whirled with the momentous fact. He could not get beyond the knowledge of her proximity, the yielding weight of her, the sweetness and the nearness. The man had no thought for the words he used in comforting platitudes, and his voice and his hand shook as he soothed her.

"Poor little girl, poor little mother, perhaps we shall find another baby where we are going."

But affection revolted at the idea, and she wept afresh.

"It won't be the same."

Silence followed; long, long silence. Her sobbing wore itself out, while Berenice fought a battle with her own timidity. She longed to ask, she feared, she determined. The child-woman, all her life trained to patient, uncomplaining, quiet, was reticent about request. It was the first time she had ever asked Lane for anything, and she gathered up her courage for the effort, for she felt it was a great demand.

"Gabrielle," she faltered. "Gabrielle said I might — something about having a baby of my own.— Do you remember? — Could you get me a baby — of my very own — to keep?" The words came muffled from his coat sleeve, but distinctly audible, striking the man with the unexpectedness and scorching power of an electric bolt.

Lane's arms fell from her, and he sat erect, grasping both sides of the chair with iron hands like a vice. Liquid fire coursed in his veins, and the demon virility laughed. His muscles grew rigid, and cold drops stood out on his forehead, while he prayed heaven for power to slay his thought. Voices! Voices! Always voices, others difficult enough to stifle, and now the last voice —

Berenice herself, asking! The eternal woman claiming her eternal right!

"Berenice," he whispered hoarsely, "Do you love me?"

The girl nodded her assurance in wondering disappointment, innocence recognizing no sequence in his question, his strange manner, and her request.

"Child, child, do you know what you are asking?" Robert's mouth was parched and his speech came thickly.

"Yes," replied Berenice, not knowing at all. She raised her head gazing into his face, and he knew from her clear eyes she did not understand.

"Yes. Wouldn't you like a baby? — We could share it."

"Oh, God!" — his grip relaxed; the tensity of his body gave way, and Lane sank back in his chair, gathering Berenice more completely into his arms. The apostrophe was to Him who had created them male and female. The war was at an end. Nature decked herself in laurels, but her partner, the demon, secure in his ultimate triumph, at the moment drew afar off and hid himself, making obeisance before a greater, for Robert loved the woman with all that was best in him.

And Berenice, gazing up into his face, saw the difference there. He was smiling at her with his eyes, that adorable, fascinating smile, seeming to cover her with caresses. She remained so, still and happy. Her eyes closed, and presently she felt him lay his cheek on her own with a new motion inexpressibly sweet; sweeter far than a kiss.

VIII

THE DEVIL

I

With the exception of a new set of canvases ranged around the walls, leaning face in, stacked above old efforts, little change had been made in the studio during a year. It was still vast, still rich in the splendor of pigments, and mellow with the half tones of age-faded textiles. Only at one side, toward the balcony, a newly introduced couch and armchair in all the audacious gaiety of fresh chintz, made, with the help of a work table, a domestic oasis among the paint-pots.

On this couch Robert lay stretched at length, reading aloud, while Berenice, in the armchair, occupied her hands stitching soft lawn and lace. It would have been difficult to guess from the calm face whether her mind most often dallied with the poignant suggestion of her work or followed the course of the reading. That she followed the articulate theme in part was proven

by her occasionally stopping the reader to ask some pertinent question. And if at other times the sound of Lane's voice fell unheeded, she must be forgiven, since the book he held offered only the intellectual temptation of Flaubert's "St. Antony," while the work in her fingers represented a supreme heart interest.

The man had settled into the satisfaction of his happiness without perceptible change, unless the observer was keen enough to mark the readiness of his smile, and a mildness illuminating the once careworn face in a sort of resurrection. But with the girl it was otherwise; she had grown wonderfully in the understanding of life. Not the surface life familiar to the palpitating heart of a great city — New York, as such, being still a name to her; part of the mysterious world shut outside, its encroaching influences guarded against with never ceasing, infallible care. But the soul life; life in its entirety as it may be purely good between a man and woman, she now knew. The delight of companionship, the word and look attuned to a single understanding in heart whole sympathy, the exquisite intercourse of mind, the sacred communion of the body; all these she cherished, sublimely conscious of their value.

Berenice began to know, too, her own limita-

tions, and concentrating her receptive faculties, set herself to learn. The girl's clear discernment, and the startling alacrity with which her mind absorbed philosophy became a lasting wonder to Lane. And while carefully excluding the voices of the world, because of the thrust they might have hidden, and the influence of the truths they could have taught, comparative truths; wealth and poverty, good and evil, the warp and woof of life, he spent hours in her society, conversing, reading aloud, singing and playing with and to her, giving instruction in his own way by example. Thus they made a world for each other. Unconsciously Robert was jealous of the thought of anything which might possibly arise to draw her from him. His treasure was for himself; where she went his heart went also. All his interest in existence was now vested in Berenice; even his art, so long the centre of his life, being set aside and neglected for her sake. The reredos, hailed as a master-piece, had been his last canvas. The painter amused himself with studies; the man lived in Berenice, and the four walls of the studio circumscribed Paradise. Occasionally when Lane was forced to recognize some social obligation, and came face to face with the laws and customs of an organized community, he felt qualms of

misgiving. But once again within the enchanted circle, where his love reigned, the burden fell from his too willing shoulders.

Surely this life of absolute unity rose above custom to a purer altitude, better, wiser, more simply good, than the hypocrisies allowed and perpetuated under the sanction of society and religion. Surely the infinite love with which he cherished Berenice, and the exquisite affection she returned, were justification of their life together. And the hope so soon to be realized, was it not the seal of God upon them? So Lane's heart guided his reason. He willed to believe himself justified in pursuing his present course. One thing above all troubled him, and for this he blamed himself unsparingly, being too honest to shirk the blame. He had not told Berenice about Helen.

In anxiety to keep the miseries of the world from her, dread of the touch of sordidness, the stain of traffic with the knowledge of evil, his desire to shield his angel from all unlovely or unhappy association, he had never said a word about his own troubles. And later, during the weeks of rebellion and struggle the fact of his marriage had been too horribly apparent to his own mind, and he had been drawn into a deception of silence, none the less repugnant to him

because the form of the lie remained obscure and unpronounced.

Not until long after nature won her battle and the harsh escutcheon of principle was replaced by banners of the joy of life floating in ecstasy, did Lane realize the girl's utter ignorance of worldly customs; understanding that in the completeness of her ignorance she gave no thought to marriage, either ignoring the rite as a negligible quantity, or unmindful of ceremony altogether. His timidity grew on him day by day, while he drifted farther and farther into the inexplicable difficulties of the situation.

Robert longed to tell her and could not bring himself to do so. Her perfect trust cowed him. If a word at the right moment would have conveyed all, he might have spoken; but to set about explaining his own fault, and the why and wherefore of its gravity, to one so purely free from suspicion, presented tremendous difficulty. At any time, confession — even the half word in an all-wise and sympathetic ear — is dread. But when the culprit must demonstrate at length sin and the theory of sin, his action and the entire construction of a social code which makes it evil, the thing becomes impossible. Lane allowed the matter to stand while he made inquiries in several

States regarding the divorce laws. Early training still asserted itself, his mind and conscience were not free; but these must be chastened into subjection. In the probable light of his child's claim, if a civil marriage could be effected with Berenice, Helen and the Church must go over.

All the man's mind was full of the approaching climax, all his heart full of tender sympathy for the woman's trial. What care and forethought could arrange to help his darling had been long ago provided; there was nothing now to do but wait. And while Lane waited anxiously in alternate hope and fear, Berenice waited calmly, cheerful, brave and full of confidence.

When she looked at Robert, so strong and loving, it seemed he must be able to help her in any crisis. Berenice had never known him to fail. She was perpetually being plunged into fresh amazement over some newly displayed ability of knowledge. And hand in hand with her pure and deep affection, blossomed a marvellous devotion and confidence. She would have followed him to death without hesitation had he so commanded, certain of the justice and wisdom of his decision. As the girl had relied on the saints in the chapel of Santa Maria, she now relied on Lane. For her the old saints were no more, faith in them having

fled, nebulous before new ideas, their shapes having gradually merged into Robert's form. Without him her soul would have been lost in a sea of doubt. She wandered perilously on strange levels, yet awake and thinking for herself, mentally stimulated, intellectually athirst, she sat at the man's feet in awe, sure of nothing but his love and his truth.

Lane stopped reading at the sound of a clock chiming five, and with the book closed over an inserted finger, lay quiet watching Berenice. As no remark was made on the discontinuance of his voice, he supposed her mind wandered from the record of temptation to dwell on the consequences of love. And thinking he saw much of the delicious thought in her imperturbable face, laid his hand on her knee, letting the action say for him — "I, too, have a part in that glorious fulfillment."

Berenice smiled, staying her work to raise her eyes with a grave, half shy, wholly sweet glance to meet his. The look expressed entirely their unity, the perfect thought between them made absolute in understanding without words.

A loud knocking on the studio door broke the spell.

"Bother!" cried Lane, getting up reluctantly,

while Berenice gathered her things together with obvious intention to vacate before intrusion.

"Don't dear," he said, as ever, watchful for her comfort. "Don't move till I see.— It can't be anybody at this hour.— All right," the man called back, signing for the telegram with the carelessness of one inured to the intense trivialities of modern life. "Margaret, asking me to fill up," was his impatient thought.

Berenice stitched on unconscious of imminent trouble, and Robert, with his back turned to her, read and re-read the scrawled words of a fatal message from beyond seas.

"No answer," he said shortly to the boy, shutting the door; but the panic in his heart had already imprinted itself on his face, and fear smote Berenice as, looking up casually, she caught sight of him.

"Ruberto! What is it!"

He went to her, and put her back gently into the big chair from which she had risen. "Nothing, little one, nothing to be alarmed about! They want me in Paris, but I won't go, I won't leave you."

It was characteristic of Lane to speak right out, rather than mince matters through a harrowing preface of suspense. But his voice, more than

his words confirmed her alarm. The hand still resting on her shoulder could feel the girl trembling. She gave no other sign, no cry, but bravely raised her eyes to his, murmuring again, "What is it?"

"They want me to go to Paris at once,— my father is ill."

Berenice quailed before the fact. To Paris! Across the treacherous ocean! Anxiety for him came first, and was swept away in alarm for herself. The instantaneous terror of desertion burst from her lips in incoherent protest.

"You — you can't go! What will become of me? You must be here! You must help me. Paris! Paris! You can't go! — I would be alone! I'm afraid! Say you won't go!"

"I know, I know! — My God! — I can't leave you! — I must go! The whole thing is impossible!" The man's words were wrung from him in face of a terrible dilemma.

She clung to his hands. "Say you won't go! Say you won't go! — Oh, Ruberto!"

"I will not go unless you tell me to. There, there! Do not excite yourself, for my sake, Berenice." How could she understand his leaving? — And they knew no tie to keep him. He must go to his mother — and yet, Berenice alone

— now! Despairingly he put it before her with short, quick sentences as though in defence as well as explanation.

"It is my mother, Berenice. My father is dying, and she is alone with him. Alone in Paris! — She is old and feeble, and she needs me."

"Your mother!" The two words fell from her white lips, pregnant with meaning, voicing to Lane more loudly than argument could ever do the claim of his own child, while, in the words, the mother of his child waived her right before a prior claim. It seemed in doing so that she laid bare to him the searching distinction of economists between the helplessness of infancy, and the inadequacy of old age. In spite of the stress of indecision, his mind grasped the facts contended. — How paralyzing! How incontrovertible! The past became utterly futile before the enormous possibilities of the future produced by that past. For a moment Lane saw himself, a man well on to middle age, isolated, crossing a plateau between two steep inclines, with perhaps ten years of steady going between the two, and only the child to mark his passing — that was all of his life! The enormous importance of the child, of all children, forced itself on him.— What hopes and ambitions for his own sprang in him at the mo-

ment! His place was certainly there; guardian of the new life. He saw the child everything, to himself and the world — and the little old lady in Paris? — Nothing! Except to his filial duty, — nothing. Of no importance whatever. The merciless truth struck him hard, and with it the thought — suppose she should ever know! What if the cruel reality were made apparent to her too? The very pity of it drove him on to his determination. He must go to Paris.

Lane had known when he read the message that he would go; and now he knew why. Contrary to his inclinations, and his sense of justice, in fear and anxiety and heaviness of heart, the journey would be undertaken.— But he would go. The knowledge of all his mother had been, and of how little she was become, with the dread spectre of himself passed on and waiting among the less than useful, authorized his going. He wondered if Berenice, too, had a vision of the spectre as she sat there with fear in her eyes. Had the apparition compelled her words? Was not the shadow of him beside the path, indeed, the root principle of all filial tradition of mankind, supported universally by custom as military defences are supported against the time of need? All misgiving fled. He felt Berenice must under-

stand; and, sinking down by her chair, leaned his head on her shoulder.

"It is my mother, Berenice, — and I am her only child."

Oh, but it was special pleading and hard to withstand! Fresh tears started to her eyes as she placed her hand tenderly on Lane's head. But he wanted her full concurrence, and besought her.

"My little old mother — she needs me — say I may go." Silence, and then — "You'd expect the little chap to go to you."

Strangely troubled, strangely glad, Berenice became conscious of the difference in his attitude, of their reversed positions. Robert, the strong man, the self-reliant, knelt at her knee asking her permission. In his trouble he had come to her to be mothered, to be counselled, to be allowed; and, with his "say that I may go," like all men in extremity, placed the responsibility on the woman. The girl felt herself grow to meet the trust. She realized the hour of her importance come, as Lane had seen the span of his diminish, for was she not now the centre on which two relied solely?

The overwhelming power of women in life dawned upon her, thrilling and awing her to less

penetrating sorrow. She felt the child move in her, and her heart moved toward the father of the child. Courage arose freshly, strengthening her soul, for his sake, for their sakes; and sweeping through her left no corner for the trembling, slinking terror of selfishness. She stroked Robert's thick hair softly with her two hands.

"Dear heart, you must go."

In the words Berenice stepped finally over the threshold into womanhood, assuming her womanly heritage of self abnegation and silent, courageous sacrifice. And although the answer was that which Lane wanted, it turned him cold as a pronounced sentence — banishment! Perhaps she felt it too, for when she had spoken she gathered him into her arms, as if to repeal the decision, as though with every effort she would prevent the separation she decreed.

They found relief in preparation; and the practical side of the journey saved both from the abysmal misery of their own thoughts. Lane, obliged to rush out and make good the remainder of the day, left to Berenice the assembling of his things, and while busying her hands with the task, she kept her mind tenaciously on the counting and sorting of shirts, socks, cravats, collars, handkerchiefs and the necessary paraphernalia.

Dinner could be no more than a demoralized pretense; and immediately after, Robert pulled a light trunk into the middle of the floor, and Berenice watched him putting into it, with direct nervous haste, the articles piled ready on the couch. She could no longer restrain her tears. The murky void lying beyond the hour of his departure seemed to creep over her like some clinging live creature, and her loneliness was made visible before her eyes.— Tomorrow! At the thought fresh tears coursed silently down the girl's cheeks, but she put the heart-ache resolutely from her, trying to enter into his preparations.

"Now, little one, do sit down!" So great is the tonic of activity to a healthy mind Robert's tone was positively cheerful under preoccupation. "That's better! I have just about finished away. — You put the razors in this case? Good.— You have really done everything. I never packed like this before."

He stopped in his progress between trunk and couch, laying his hand in caress on her hair; and tilting back her face for a kiss, caught the glint of tears. "My girl! My brave woman — don't!" he cried brokenly. "You must be strong, you must try to cheer up, to be my brave

heart. I may get back in time, you know. If — it is over there, I may get back."

Berenice could not command her voice to speak, but she managed to twist a smile across her face while the tears ran faster. Not realizing her panic so sternly kept at bay, he greeted the reassuring smile with a "That's better! That is my own Berenice!" and hurried on to the completion of his arrangements.

The trunk at last strapped and labeled, standing an awful witness of approaching fate, Lane sat down to write. He covered the pages rapidly, his custom in correspondence, then hesitated, reread the letter, and tearing it threw the pieces aside. Berenice had never before seen him do such a thing. "Robert must be very much upset," she thought, and in a new anxiety forgot the menace of the hours. He wrote again, more slowly, and while placing the sheet in an envelope began to speak.

"This is to my cousin, Berenice, I went to see her, that is what kept me so long. She was not at home. Little one. I am so sorry I could not see her myself. I wanted to tell her about — you; to make her feel how precious you are to me." His hand sought the woman's hand. "I would go to her now, if it were possible but she

is in Boston. Tomorrow morning, the servant says, she will certainly be back, and she will come to you. Do not be afraid of her, sweetheart, Margaret is kind and good, a splendid woman, and will do anything to help you. I have asked her for the sake of our long friendship to come at once. She will be here very shortly after I leave; and she will find the right person to stay with you, for you must not be alone. I want you to have some one with you all the time. I tried to get the nurse this afternoon but she is still on her last case. I will tell Frau Gratz about Margaret; that you expect her — and I don't think, dear, if I were you I would see anybody else."

Oh, she could only nod to it all, assenting with a leaden heart to the unmistakable preparations for a long absence, as Lane continued his instructions counting out a generous supply of money.

"Si, si, I understand!" She shoved the bills aside on the table, and rested her head there, her heart strained to bursting. Lane fearing an hysterical collapse for her dared not say the tender things he felt, lest by look or motion he might break utterly the tottering wall of self-control. In an effort to divert her mind he crossed the studio, and began rummaging among old canvases, moving them aside one by one, digging below the

surface of long untouched piles, exhuming studies, ever more and more dust stained, smaller, and older; turning them carelessly this way and that, some face in some out, hunting for a particular one. Presently Berenice began to watch him, idly interested in their unfamiliar faces. For curiosity had not prompted her to inspect these ancient records of his art, and although fragmentary and mostly unfinished, they were new to her.

One specially forced her attention: a study of a woman's head, simply direct, it caught her fancy with a likeness to someone she had seen, being familiar in an unfamiliar way, haunting some lobby of her memory, as a face passed and marked in a crowd will occasionally revive itself with persistence.— A beautiful, young face, cold and proud, the excellence of the drawing culminating in the poise of the head, about which hauteur and grace combined. Evidently the study was years old, for the dress and arrangement of hair struck Berenice as fantastically ugly. She opened her mouth to speak of it to Robert, to ask him about the head; but, at the same moment, he turned quickly, exclaiming.

"At last! Here it is!" And he brought a little canvas to her in his hands, rubbing it carefully free of dust.

"I want to show you my mother, Berenice.—Is that right?" holding the portrait up.

"A little more — there!" In answer to her sign he turned it from the light. And after her long, silent inspection, "Now you see why I must go."

She nodded, understanding. It was a picture of a fragile, small woman, with softly parted gray hair, and a folded gown of lace and lavender, who looked only fit to be cherished. Berenice loved at once the sweetly benevolent face, worn into wisdom of many trials, and showing a little the fostered timidity of a past age; the absence of self-reliance surely resulting from a life spent in dependence and subjection. Mrs. Bartholomew Lane's face bore the stamp of her husband's individuality more plainly than it expressed her own; for his masterful spirit had crushed hers to fragrance as one crumbles dried rose leaves in a pot-pourri.

"It is like Sister Elisabetta, at Santa Maria, who was always ill." As she spoke Berenice noted the tenderness of Lane's mouth without the strength, and loved the lady of the portrait.

"You see Berenice? You do understand? Think of her in Paris, alone — with French

nurses, French doctors, perhaps French laws and other intricacies to worry over."

"You must go to her, Ruberto. You must certainly go. She is very lovely:"

"Isn't she? I was proud of this when I did it!" He regarded the painting half in pride of the person, half in the reminiscent pride of achievement. "The mater always wore those little gowns for me when I was at home."

They talked of the little old lady alone in the foreign city till gradually the girl's sense of her own loss merged into feeling of the other's pitiable need. It had been an inspiration on the part of Lane, to raise Berenice out of herself to generous sympathy, by awakening an affection for his mother. And now she was quiet he persuaded her to go to bed, and stayed beside her into the small hours of the morning. He could not have slept. The time of inaction had come when the man must indulge his fear, but the sound of her regular breathing reassured him. That he had never known his cousin to fail in charity or efficiency or in any request he had made of her was his one rock of consolation; for the thought with which he had sought to encourage Berenice, the possibility of his immediate return, was double edged and shamed the hope. He had sent the note to Margaret's

house by special messenger, and had made the boy bring him a receipt, it could not miscarry, and the chauffeur had orders to meet the early train, even allowing for delays she must be with Berenice inside two hours after he left, and he was confident of their mutual understanding once they were together. Robert went over and over every arrangement finding no flaw, and lulling his anxiety he kept watch, counting in reluctance the half hours flying on to his leave-taking.

When the parting came he cut it short on purpose. Berenice bore up bravely to the end, no cry nor tears escaped her. But in the cab, in mid ocean, in the weary uncertainty of long months following, he felt again the painful tension of her hands on his arm, the despair in her eyes, the dry agony of her voice, as she reiterated in a toneless whisper the simple farewell.

"Addio, Ruberto."

This repression of grief Lane felt more powerful than any hysterical display, and after the door was shut went back to kiss her once more, and found the little figure standing as he had left her, desolate, amid the familiar surroundings of their every day life. It tore at him then, the grievousness of leaving her; filling his heart, his throat, his eyes, and he must at that moment have refused

to go had not the woman herself gently put him from her after the embrace, saying:

"Go, Ruberto, go. You have no time to lose."

So in the extremity of haste he rushed to the cab below, with the pain of her mild repulsion tingling through and through him.

II

For Berenice there was no relief of action, only the trial of waiting. Sadly she felt it; no need for her to do anything. And so she sat motionless in the big chair, her hands idle, her mind a blank, while a numbness of loss crept from her heart into her limbs, paralyzing both thought and action; and lightning-like flashes of terror, for him, for herself shot distressingly through the black monotony of her mood.

In hopeless misery she seemed to have lived a decade oppressed by a sense of universal instability. Could it be only a few hours — less than a day! And the joy and reality of her life already wiped out! Robert gone from her. At first the girl was only aware of being deserted, left terribly by herself in the great room; then her recuperating senses concentrated on one spot of light, and she saw a face gazing into hers from the level of the

floor opposite. It was the painted face of the haughty woman whom she had tried to remember the night before. Illuminated by a shifting ray of sunlight, it too seemed to be alone in blackness, cold, relentless, hateful, rising out of the gulf of her despair to mock her with its cruel beauty.

She hated the thing and then she feared it; feared the menace of it. All the unspoken dread of the coming weeks seemed, to her disordered mind, protrayed in the face. Fascinated and repelled, a nervous trembling seized her, and at the same time she called herself a big baby. Berenice knew her feeling a nervous illusion, and assured herself that she looked at no spirit, malign or otherwise, but only at an old study, paint and canvas, neither more nor less. As in a nightmare, reason ran clearly current with fancy, yet for a long time imagination triumphed into hypnotic fear. At last, as the beam of light moved on, the baleful face faded into a realizable part of her whole surrounding, and Berenice could afford to laugh at her silliness. But the horror had been too real to chance a repetition, so she turned the head about to the wall, stacking a miscellaneous lot of small frames over it.

The girl set herself to trifling employments in order to keep her mind from worry; but it was dif-

ficult. If only Margaret, that mysterious, kind-hearted, womanly helper would come! Already the hands of the clock had circled two hours since Robert left — At the discovery Berenice smiled. Why not write to him? Two hours! An eternity of separation! Surely she must write to him. The things were all there ready, as he had left them the previous night, and drawing a small chair up behind the large one, she immediately began her letter.

"True heart, my adored husband, all is well with us.— "

She pondered the written words.— Yes, she would address him so. Once or twice, on special occasions, she had used the essential phrase, as he had claimed her under the like sacred name, but she was still shy of it, and yet glad to use it now. She felt this first letter to Robert a very special occasion, and wanted him to feel it so. Engrossed in her thoughts she did not hear a sharp knock, nor the door open; and when she looked up, a stately figure already stood inside the room. A woman undenably very smart, with an elegance more formidable than attractive, and the air of one accustomed to consideration, perfectly sure of herself and of the world in which she moved.

Berenice realized that this must be the friend

Robert had chosen for her. She had not consciously formed any idea of Margaret, yet she felt chilled and disappointed, understanding why he had said, "Do not be afraid of her." She rose half eagerly, half timidly, resting one hand on the back of the arm chair, while the stranger swept her assured glance over the room. When their eyes met the girl's heart misgave her, but with a great effort to overcome her shyness, she asked:

"Are you Margaret? Are you Robert's cousin?"

The voice in answer rang so hardly it seemed to shatter the silence.

"No. I am Robert Lane's wife. Is he here?"

Berenice did not realize the words for her mind was bent in another direction — There must have been a mistake! Yet as a poisoned barb the sentence spread an evil in her system, destroying happiness. Uncertainty, suspicion, and dismay rushed over her; more dreadful far than the alarm of Robert's departure. Never before had the girl felt anything of the kind. She thought it some premonitory physical symptom and exerted her strength for control, concentrating her mind to explain the blunder, for Lane had told her to see no one, and had left directions. Very graciously she

spoke her thought, moving uneasily from behind the chair.

"I am afraid there has been some mistake.—"

At the same moment the stranger stepped forward into the room and into the light. And the words died on Berenice's lips. Peace died too, and hope fled in a panic, for it was the same face that had gazed at her an hour before, compelling to imaginary frenzy.— Older to be sure, and bearing the mark of recent illness, but unmistakably the same, and more than ever haunting in familiarity.

Under the spell of that severe beauty, more terrible because it lived, Berenice again lost touch with her surroundings, while the hard eyes travelled over her deliberately from head to foot, taking in every detail, as she stood pitilessly illuminated beneath the white light from the high north window. No escape offered; she was hopelessly confessed by every line and contour, and, though shy before a stranger, Berenice was not prepared for that awful, contemptuous stare in which the inspection culminated. It stirred more than her modesty. She felt that look held a venom far beyond the uncharitable, essaying to search every secret of her life, to weigh her motives and Robert's love, to judge, question, condemn. And under its

impertinent satisfied curiosity, the girl felt her face on fire. Not only the unkindness, but a sort of haughty superiority angered her.

When she had quite finished looking, the strange woman spoke, and her voice, sharp edged with sarcasm, cut the other's life in two, as cleanly as if with a stroke of cold steel.

"Evidently, there has been some mistake."

The offensive repetition of her own words, putting Berenice at fault, summoned resentment to her aid. There was blood in the girl's veins that brooked no insult. Throwing up her head, she met the stranger's eyes with an intense arrogant pride. Who then was this officious woman who dared flaut her under Robert's roof? — In one blinding flash the answer came from memory:

"I am Robert Lane's wife."

His "wife!" It sprang on her with tigerish ferocity, sinking its ugly fangs deep into her heart. And from the wounds doubt gushed like the jets of a boiling geyser. Its ebullition swamped her pride.— Wife! The word burned her. Wife! That most tender, sacred name between them. What did it mean in the mouth of a strange woman? Wife! Wife! Wife! It cried and struggled in her consciousness. It shouted the facts aloud to her understanding — Yet she would have none

of it. Her love combated the vile sense. With all the force of her being, her hope, her faith, she put it from her, warring for her belief in the man.— Yet the speech of this person was not alone to convict him — there was the portrait. Remembering it, and the trance-like loathing of a few hours earlier, Berenice felt weak, emptied of all trust.— Certainly that face had been in his life. He had known it, painted it, perhaps loved it.— That beautiful, cruel face! She knew she had only to cross the floor for irrefutable evidence against him, and knowing it hated the beauty. As it repelled her she sought to cast aside conviction of fact, but whether she would or not enlightenment grew and grew upon her understanding.

Bitterly she realized the whole of life and custom, the world and the ways thereof. And it was not that one word, nor the sound, nor the meaning of it which sped the revelation, but from the expression on the face of the other woman dawned her awakening, from the steady look of haughty superiority which had kindled her resentment, and now illuminated her shame.

But what was humiliation to her grief! Robert had deceived her! Under the force of this stupendous overpowering blow, her body swayed as one sways standing in darkness. All was dark to

Berenice. All dead. She knew no shame, no fear, no aching heart; but suffered in a total absence of all sensation, while the functions of the universe seemed to abate, and an incompetent God pass out of heaven. For this exactly had occurred — Her God was no more. In growing affection, confidence, and admiration she had dethroned the first God of convent teaching, and set Lane in His place. And now in bitterness she recognized the feet of clay.— Robert, the man whom she had created God, answered her faith with a lie! — When he had called her "wife" he had made sport of her.— His love! His boasted love! What had it been?

The thought on the other side staggered her infidelity. Even the weight of his iniquity could not disprove the power of his love. Revelation might turn the sweetness of it to gall but the strength remained. It became an obsession. She fought vainly to be free from remembrance. And all the time the beautiful face, the hateful face, the face of his wife, regarded her disdainfully.

Before the eyes of Berenice the stranger rang the bell and waited till the cumbersome form of Frau Gratz appeared, yet the girl was unconscious of the two as a dead woman. She had no ears for the fragmentary conversation, the intruder's ques-

tions in regard to what news Mr. Lane had received from Paris, and when? Whether it was more full than the brief message received by herself, and if he had already left? And the panting replies and protestations of the heavy German woman, her invariable — "Ach du lieber Gott!" her invariable shrug, her slipshod departure; nor for the rustle of the stranger's exit.

If Helen had hoped to impress righteous disapproval on the sinful girl by ignoring her, she failed. She had been an instrument of fate for a purpose, and from that moment her office ceased, for the other was far beyond any emotion she could perceive or understand.

The face was gone. That was all Berenice knew — and that was relief. It was gone, and now nothing remained.— Robert had deceived her! — It was the end! Doubt swept the soul adrift from reality. As a drowning body lost in converging waters, her spirit cast about, and finding not so much as a straw to stay destruction, sank into the abyss. She felt herself sinking down into soft blackness, down, down, down, an interminable awful depth. Yet easily restful, fold upon fold, its volume closed above her, and she gave herself up to the soundless deep where no

hard face, or cold tone, or evil apocalypse had power to smite her soul.

When Berenice recovered consciousness, she found herself lying on the studio floor in the same place where she had sunk down. All was darkness about her still, but a healthy, ventilated, natural darkness, through which her senses made out tangible form. She felt the stiffness of her limbs from cramp, and the cool surface of the polished boards, and for a minute or two her mind strayed deliciously free from memory of trouble.

What had happened? She sat up, tracing the ghosts of familiar objects in the moonlight. The heavy easels, the Jacobean table with its twisted legs, her work table, the couch and chair, and beyond, the fireplace, with Lane's pipes in a row on the shelf: — that waked her. She remembered him, craving him.— And then remembered his wife! The one word blazed in her consciousness, it seemed to be alive in the blue white fire of the moonbeams, and to run all around her in eager tongues of dancing flame, as the ring of fire ran around Brunhilda. All came back to her now. Robert was gone — farther than to Paris! He was quite gone. Joy was dead; her love was dead. And the God she had turned out to make

room for Robert? — Gone too. Deceit mocked her credulity.

With a great effort Berenice rose and passed to her own room. Every little article she touched, every suggestion of their life together tore a fresh wound in her heart, or seared the old. And she shivered to think of the roof-garden with its garland of delicious memories. The studio and its associations were grown hateful to her. She could bear them no longer, and to get away from it, from sights and odours poignant with suggestion became her only thought.

Peace — peace, anywhere, away from these torturing reminders!

With trembling hands she pinned on a hat, and taking only her rosary, the one thing she had brought to the place, on unsteady feet threaded her way for the last time among the familiarly set furniture of the large room. Supporting herself by the wall, she stole noiselessly down the several flights and through the entrance. A draught of fresh air revived her for the moment, and animated by a false vigour, she stepped bravely to the street, and crept away into the black shadows of the tall buildings.

Berenice had not wasted strength in closing the massive door, and now, out of the darkness, she

heard it bang behind her, reverberating fatefully through the vacant night as it had banged and echoed long before — declamatory of her entering.

IX

TABLEAUX

I

For thirty years the square had been a catspaw of contending interests; one of those ports of dilapidation always cited by local reformers in committee meetings, deputations, and prosy after dinner speeches. On plans of civic improvement it appeared wonderfully remodelled and adorned, or in less ambitious schemes was blotted out. Yet still it lingered in ugliness, the relic of a commercial centre on the west side, not even corrupt, harmless, though dead, guiltless of self destruction, its condition purely a result of suspended action.

Artists and statesmen might patter tirelessly concerning the education of the masses, proving and disproving with platitudinous argument the elevating virtue of bronze horses erected in strategical positions, or the national good accruing from some leader, preferably defunct, striking a

noble attitude, pedestaled in the centre of the thoroughfare. While man talked the square waited, the four sides of it standing shoulder to shoulder till the mighty breath of enterprise should quicken it in new life, and the all consuming syndicates plant on the present scene of commercial dejection hives of industry.

Until such time the cries of the reformers were more than justified. Here was ample space for beauty, yet no fenced island of delight rose from the enclosure to relieve the weariness of tired eyes. Monotony of stone, stone, and more stone, spread to the miserable limits, unbroken and unredeemed beneath the blazing sun; level, bare, begrimed, as though its pallid face had long since been reduced to ashes of ambition, and the same strewn in uncanny sport over the colorless buildings, none of which rose high enough to afford shade. All was glare and heat.

Environment had outgrown the size of the shops so that many of them now stood empty. Along the west side dirty windows abandoned their wretchedness to the exploiting of highly colored advertisements. On door fronts second class theaters posted their attractions fully illustrated, with frequent lewd embellishment by vagrant hand, and ward politicians clamoured for votes

from yellow and pink quarter sheets. On the east trade spoke for itself in rows of second hand garments hung out for the inspection of possible buyer. And at the corner of an ingressive street, a purveyor spread his stock of yesterday's unconsumed fruits and vegetables with inviting display. Here alone was any sound audible, and that a droning sibilance more incentive to sleep than action, the incessant buzzing of a million flies.

The whole square lay in sun-stricken emptiness, and by noon heat waves visibly quivered across the surface of the pavement. Turning in from where the unpleasant harsh contrast of a thoroughfare struck on the ear, even a stout heart must have dreaded the ordeal of crossing that shelterless space, or setting foot on the burning stones.

From the back windows of the Theatrical Trust Company, Jasper Nott stared out onto the deadness, marvelling. Such peace — in the very midriff of New York City! — Such quiet, a stone throw from her rapacious energy! The Englishman could not believe the anomaly. Except for its sordid ugliness it might be the Temple and the Inns of Court. Having nothing to do while he waited, Jasper gazed long and became infected with its poison, its steeped inactivity; being never more apparently himself. But here the state of

como was not pose. Heat, light and silence drugged the brain till thought no more than simmered.

A cart rattling over the stones roused him to attention, rousing the place also into life. Three pedestrians straggled down the dazzling walk one after another, slowly with bent heads. Then Nott saw a fat Jew come to the door of his shop, saw him wipe his fat hand over his fat sweating face, while his eyes glutted themselves on the delicacies laid out under the faded awning of his neighbour's establishment. He disappeared, and reappeared, and went again inside, and finally unable to resist the succulent temptation gave way, and satisfied his craving. Jasper wondered whether an altercation over price, or mere neighbourly gossip, caused the fat man to linger standing in the sun, graphic in gesticulation, until, with his teeth already set in the coveted fruit, he vanished for good and all.

Watching this drama of a gourmand, Nott missed the beginning of another yet more interesting. Two figures were crossing the rough pavement in a long diagonal, but he only became aware of them when they had travelled painfully about half the distance. One, a man in the familiar dress of the police walked with stolid indifference, carelessly making his way to the nearest station,

while his prisoner in charge showed no resistance. The aspect of the latter touched Jasper's curiosity. Slowly, so slowly, she moved, drooping and stumbling, dragging one foot after the other, as though each single step must be the end of her endurance. Her black dress drew the heat about her and suffocated her with clinging folds. Slowly as the officer moved, the woman moved more slowly, hanging back and a little away from his rigid, detaining hand, but in fatigue not rebellion. Her disengaged arm hung limp as a dead thing by her side, her fingers clasped on the rim of a battered straw hat. And the sun smote her unprotected head to a flaming centre of heat and color.

Like two crawling flies the man and woman crossed the square. Now she stumbled and went down almost on her knees, and again stood still, evidently protesting her inability. He could see the officer reason with her, pointing to the station, and taking her arm, not unkindly, draw her on.

At first glance Nott thought it a case of drunkenness, but as the woman turned in supplication, he noticed that about her which aroused his deepest pity. It seemed to cry aloud for help, for a charity more personal than city boards contrive. In spite of his own exhaustion, Jasper had a half mind to stroll over to the station and find out

about the affair. Plenty of time to overtake them — deuced hot though! Yet he was tempted to go. Pushing his hat a little farther back on his head and thrusting his cane under his arm, he turned to the door. At the same moment it opened to admit Mark Hamsworthy.

Jasper smiled at the thought of his old self confronted with such substantial evidence of the new. He had almost forgotten! Those days of idle excursion into the province of law and justice and the affairs of others were for him no more, they belonged to the negative. This man, who had come in his shoes, to sign a contract with the great Hamsworthy for the production of a sparkling curtain raiser, had nothing to do with negatives. He was a new creation of Margaret's influence, holding a partnership with her in the affirmative as he did in the one act play. But so hard dies the unregenerate, he had forgotten, for the moment — forgotten Hamsworthy, by Jove!

Nott at last did real things if in an unreal manner. His old pose and his old boredom crept through the interview with the manager, but in spite of it they talked straight business for half an hour. Then Jasper sought the coolest place for a light lunch. He felt unaccountably done up, and now that his business was finished congratulated

himself more on his freedom to get out of the city than on its success. His first experience of an American heat wave had driven him to this sudden change of plan. Determined to leave New York at once he wired Margaret to await him in Boston and prepare to start directly on their long talked of fishing trip in the unexplored wilds of northern Canada. And as he reread her reply of acquiescence, keen concern for him, and manifold directions about closing the house, he smiled, thinking of his wife's pleasure when he arrived with news of the contract.

He had forgotten completely the red haired mother-to-be, the unuttered cry for help and his impulse of pity. So he ate, and planned, and anticipated, without a thought of the little police tableau in the old square, and all unconscious that he was himself involved in, and partly responsible for its perpetration.

Berenice sat on a low chair in one of the small cubicles of a Catholic maternity hospital. She wore the blue and white striped cotton dress provided for convalescent patients in the institution,

and occupied her quick fingers in making buttonholes in a similar garment.

The tiny apartment, with its whitewashed walls and uncovered floor, was cheerfully, spotlessly clean, and she felt at home in its bareness, though it contained nothing but a bed, the chair on which she sat, and a table of diminutive size. On the wall opposite the door a crucifix hung, with a cheap framed picture of the Virgin, the latter probably a gift from some charitable fraternity.

To Berenice, who had lain ashamed days and nights in a public ward, the cubicle seemed a heaven of privacy, dearly familiar, a sanctuary like her own little room at Santa Maria, in which the mornings of her youth had dawned untroubled, and the evenings closed safely over her sleepy head. Those days, brought vividly to her by present association, illuminated her mind from afar, as a reincarnated soul might catch reminiscent flashes of a former existence.

Once when she thought of the convent she had hated the confining walls, and cared only to love the garden, beautiful home of live things. But now it was of the convent life she dreamed; its even tenor, its safe, unremitting duty, the gentle narcotic of it all. Long ago she had fancied the placid sisters devotees like herself, vowed only to

the service of God, and unacquainted with the world outside. Now she knew some of them, women who had run away from the consuming fear of life; for the terrors of the reality surrounded her. It seemed a gulf of abysmal misery, occupying centuries, cleft the scheme of things, and divided period from period, rolling darkly behind, separating her from peace and joy and faith.

Had Berenice died and been resurrected, she could hardly have been more changed than in this short space of time. Margaret le Hunt's youthful Galahad in prayer could be no more, for the girl's form had ripened to resemblance of the exquisite Madonna, and her face bore the mark of tribulation. But the change was not alone physical, nor a matter of abated strength, Time and care would fill her hollow cheeks and deepen her pallor to a healthy bloom, and the dark circles fade from her mournful eyes though their intimate knowledge of pain could never fade. The shadow of that greater suffering, spiritual conflict, lay over the face like a thin veil.

From a tender heart faith had been violently wrenched, and the wounds left their scar. Berenice, truly woman, had turned confidently from her old belief to the "God in him," and after

Lane's failure, her soul laboured through unutterable hours of infidelity till she was handed over to the drastic counter irritant of bodily pain, while nature strove to bring forth life from the arms and shadow of death.

Futile effort of spirit and body! For three short days the girl rejoiced in her treasure, again praising God who had been Himself a Babe, and worshipping her Madonna, but those in attendance pitied her joy, knowing how it must be, for the babe was weak and his little hands slipped from their hold on life. When they told Berenice her child was dead, the numbed senses returned no violent sign of grief; she lay with her face to the wall as one who is done with life, nor could they arouse her from lethargy.

She was overwhelmed by the bitterness of this final injustice. To have fainted in agony stayed only with the promise of life, and have reaped — death! She could not forgive God. Every thought and affection and hope had been for her child, the crowning star of her devotion. And as she had awaited patiently, fearfully the trial, so she had counted surely on the reward. The valley of the shadow, and then the child would lie in her arms warmly, her own for whom she had wrestled, indisputably her own forever. The woman had

feared she might not be spared to enjoy him, but the idea of death to the babe never occurred to her.

Berenice felt she had been tricked and wished to die, if need be without God, for He after all was an abstraction, and man — the man — a failure, while the vigorous child opposite in the arms of her fellow patient was a tangible, delicious possession, enough to fill the heart of any woman, and keep her fingers busy, and her brain away from the contemplation of tiresome creeds. And of this she had been robbed. A sense of her own absolute desertion and of the uselessness of life overcame her, and turning her face into the pillow she wept stormily.

The girl abandoned herself to grief, but in her prostrate condition its force could not last. For hours she lay with tears trickling weakly through her fingers, the dominant passion of her nature, the mother instinct, awake from its unnatural slumber to yearning disappointment. She cried for her little son and fretted for him, wanting his tender form in her arms, till her temperature rose and the nurse on duty scolded her kindly for indulging her sorrow.

It was no use to bring other infants trying to deceive her instinct; the savage egotism of mater-

nity would have none of them. She wept, and then she raved, in mounting fever, and sat up in bed, wildly claiming the boy in her neighbour's arms as her own, her very own, and accusing the woman of homicidal theft. At this stage they removed her to the cubicle, and from the sharp attack of brain fever she rose healed, but not yet free of hallucination.

The hospital authorities surrounded her with an intense professional optimism and with special kindness, for the unbalance wrought by grief over her dead son touched even their outworn feelings. The sight of the refined, beautiful girl going through the form of soothing her child moved them all, accustomed as they were to the atmosphere of the wards, where hard faces, hard hands, and harder indifference were the rule. And Berenice, appreciating their efforts, tried to be patient. In her lucid hours she realized sorrow had branded her strangely, and fearful lest the visionary insanity might not wear away, she endeavored to keep her mind occupied as they told her. But it was very difficult. In trying not to think of the future, she fell into dreaming of the past which was as bad. After she lost Robert, Berenice had been comforted by the knowledge of two individualities and that wonderful promise of entity was

earnest of love and interest also. Now she knew herself but one soul only, and terribly alone.

As she sat stitching these thoughts troubled the tired brain, a ceaseless burden reiterated dully to overpowering lassitude. Her work dropped in her lap, her hands lay idle, the sound of the chair rocking over an uneven board died away. Silence reigned in the miniature apartment, and silence reigned outside. Everywhere it was the same, full of the crushing weight of dead silence, swooning in summer heat. The girl in her trance was not less still than the heavy air, till, from the quadrangle of the institution, a muffled bell tolled vespers, its soft tongue hardly breaking the oppressive stillness. At its call Berenice arose. Her face now animated by unnatural light and colour looked that of another woman. She moved to the bedside, stooped as though to raise a weight in her arms, and turning laid a cheek against the imaginary precious burden. Then she hushed the dream-child with a delicious low refrain, swaying her body in harmony to the chant, and crossed to the chair, and seating herself opened the bosom of her dress, preparing to enact the most sacred part of the chaste drama of motherhood.

The devil himself must have wept at the pity of her labouring under this hallucination, beauti-

ful in the womanly figure so generously disposed for the maternal rite, and in the sweet face wrapped in delighted contemplation, while each exquisite motion made more apparent the empty arms and distressing futility of her sacrifice of personal modesty.

For a few moments only Berenice lay at the mercy of her disordered brain. Then the harsh stroke of a city clock drowned out the bell of evensong, startling her to consciousness of mental lapse. Hot blood rushed over her face. She cried out as one in pain, and casting herself at the feet of the crucifix below the little Virgin, called wildly on God — the God of her youth, as the hard-driven spirit will return and cling in blind faith after reason ceases to control emotion.

"Mother of God!" She prayed. "Mother of God, spare me! Thou who didst thyself bear and suffer, thou who didst suckle a Man Child — the very God, at thine own breasts — have mercy upon me! Forgive me my sins. Forgive me my sins, and remove this evil from me! Leave me reason — Oh, Merciful Mother, have I not suffered? Am I not bereft? — I commit the babe to thy arms — Mother of Christ, guard him."

So Berenice prayed with broken confession, terribly from her broken heart, and as she prayed Sis-

ter Constance opened the door, and softly closed it again.

"The girl is at her prayers," the gentle creature apologized to the handsome woman who had signified a wish to see the institution. "It is a sad case, not the class of our ward patients at all. But she is a good girl, a very good girl — and we need not disturb her prayers. This cubicle is identical with the others," opening the next door. "There are six of these on either side of the corridor, and four corridors."

The women passed on, losing sight of individual trouble amidst the amazing repetitions and levelling regulations of organized charity. And so well did Sister Constance impress on the visitor the excellence of their work and its necessity that Mrs. Robert Lane was moved to leave behind her a cheque in four figures at the disposal of this philanthropic body.

X

THE AWAKENING

Twenty artificers of commercial smartness crowded into one end of the long work-room at Cross and Spader's, where the trimming tables, piled high with bright silks and velvets and rich fabrics oppressively unseasonable, increased the closeness of the atmosphere. Already the factory was rushing preparations, and reluctant perspiring hands worked in late August heat on the construction of novelties for mid-winter use. The girls were careless this morning of weather and work, for it was Monday, the worst and hardest of all the six toilsome days, and they idled and talked, while a holiday wearied superintendent at her wit's end goaded them to the prescribed degree of industry.

Mostly the gossip was trivial chatter with the oft repeated "he said," and "I said," and "he said" pointing emotional epochs in the graphic stories, and occasionally a situation, at which the audience suspended action to hang upon the cli-

max till a harsh reprimand smote them again to application. Girls known to have "no steady" listened docilely, but those whose beaux had only failed temporarily to justify the hopes centered in the weekly gala day, set a standard and maintained their independence by criticism, for to be entertained in imagination only is to accept none but the best.

"Any fellow that takes me out can look sharp about gvin' me the latest stunts!" cried a shrill voice, quarrelsome from neglect, having been stifled for two consecutive Sundays in the stuffiness of a hall bedroom, and Flossy, the most popular of them all, tossing a mass of golden curls and tilting her chin, settled the pretensions of a foolhardy narrator.

"The witching waves — Silly! That's a duffer's game now, why Teddy Forbes and me turned it down a year ago June.— Hand over that bolt of ribbon, Redhead."

Berenice passed the ribbon without comment. For a short time after her advent in the work room curiosity had run riot. The other girls, thoroughly expert in summing up a rival's "chances" and the cards she had to play, did not deny the new comer beauty and grace; but it soon became evident that she had no beaux, and she began to fall below the

mysterious criterion of the trimmers. None knew why. "Too quiet," was the verdict, and "It's no use bein' a good looker if you dress dowdy" their advice, over which the stranger smiled pleasantly. It did not, however, cause her to alter the shape of her hat, or invest in the "perfectly sweet" turquoise ear-rings recommended by Flossy, and to be got for only thirty-nine cents.

This volatile person, having in the first rush of enthusiasm extended the patronage of a select circle to the new girl, offering to introduce her to some "swell fellows," and having been met with gracious but unmistakable discouragement, had flown into a huff, and later found various ways to embitter her lot; whereupon the Good Natured One had become a champion.

Innate reserve, however, proved a barrier to allies as well as foes, and in the end they only tolerated Berenice. She did not wish to be unfriendly, and endeavoured to interest hereself in the confidences of her associates. But it was hopeless from the beginning. With Robert and the child fresh in her memory she could not help shrinking from their rude humor; she could not be one of them, nor in harmony with any part of her present surroundings in the factory or the boarding-house — that very superior "home" to

which the self elected partisan had introduced her.

Mrs. Mede's, one of the establishments which must rise hand in hand with the long hours and short payments of a Cross and Spader, was considered a first rate house. Popularity marked it, and full rooms kept full pockets for the proprietress, the secret of her success resolving itself into an almost honest bargain. For on her table Mrs. Mede served rather fewer flies and more and better food than could be obtained elsewhere in the locality, for which she charged a pittance more a week. "The little more and how much it is!" Out of the nothingness of her wages Berenice just managed it, and that only by getting up early enough to walk to the shop in the morning, and trudging home wearily at night, and very often going without lunch. Two meals a day she could eat were more benefit than three of which she took nothing; the whole question was one of fractions and fine shades that made life barely endurable.

Once settled in these surroundings Berenice had felt she would be at least in harbour and could rest. But soon inexperience was forced to meet a new and alarming problem in the constant attentions of a flashy young man aspiring to friendship. Unaccustomed as she was to labour the girl did not mind working all day, grateful for occupation

in the respite it offered from thought, nor did she shrink from turning out early every morning and in all weather; but to return worn out at night and be subjected to the machinations of G. Hammerton Rust, gambler, grew into an unbearable trial. And Rust was a long established patron of Mrs. Mede's boarding house.

The situation had begun when G. Hammerton, arrayed in a loud suit and vivid cravat, returned after one of his frequent absences from town, and took his accustomed place at the table opposite to Berenice. He was an old-young man whose sleek head, advertising a reckless use of brilliantine, pronounced him a satellite of fashion. And he was known to be reckless in other ways, as a "grand spender" and a "good dresser." Some of the men made a pretense of intimacy with this dashing personality, but when questioned were forced to hide their vacuity behind a multiplicity of words — for none knew exactly his legitimate footing. He was proven friends with more than one theatrical man great enough to bestow passes, and it was whispered "followed the races." His conversation radiated suggestion of many vocations past, present and planned, but of data he was non-committal. In fact G. Hammerton Rust made a mystery of himself to his own ends, and

the halo of secrecy added immensely to his importance with the women, among whom he was an acknowledged "masher" and more than a little vain of his charm, while affecting lack of susceptibility.

On entering the room he was at once aware of Berenice. But the girl continued to eat her dinner unmoved, as though no distinguished person of the opposite sex was within miles of her. In the cursory glance due to any newcomer, she had remarked the shifty, bold eyes and the coarse mouth, and had straightway turned her whole attention to the tired lettuce masquerading as a salad.

G. Hammerton knew himself hit — hard hit! Her beauty attracted and roused his jaded interest, but, more salient than this, her indifference piqued him.

"She's a peach!" he said to himself between mouthfuls. "Dowdy,— yes, but that could be improved. Down on her uppers," he reckoned. The man, whose vices did not prevent him from generosity, really felt sorry for the girl. He wondered what she would look like in blue, bright blue with a big hat — feathers — and some style about it? If only the next race could be successfully pulled Rust promised himself a time — a

regular rouser! Visions of a motor flitted before him, wherein he saw Berenice, garishly bedizened, and enthroned beside himself.— Well, the women had never complained he was mean — and this one was rare! Why, he was ready to do things for her!

The ultimate conclusion of the thought was broken in upon by the entrance of the Good Natured One, who greeted him hilariously. Perhaps she did not mark the quality of his eye, perhaps, since he showed no signs of becoming a steady, thought it of no moment; at any rate, being primarily on the look out for a good time, she accepted all his attentions, and the volubility of her welcome was a flattering tribute. The man talked back to her freely, all the time more and more conscious of the presence of Berenice. As the meal progressed the masculine pride in him stirred. He began to expand and to assert his personality, throwing himself fully into the conversation, discussing, explaining, disclosing, and always on the same theme, himself and his affairs, his affluence, his prowess.

Berenice took no notice of him at all. In the middle of a startling recitation, in which, as might be detected from the beginning, G. Hammerton Rust, against overpowering odds, was ordained to

come out on top, this amazing young woman shoved the still-tolerably-clean-but-destined-to-be-much-worse Monday night table napkin into its numbered ring, and quietly rose to leave the room.

The man's face flushed and his tongue faltered as he waited for her passing. She had almost to touch him squeezing between the table and the door, and he did not make it easier for her by any movement to minimize himself, but just waited — and in a moment she was gone. Without even a glance! It passed for a natural interruption and he finished the tale to the Good Natured One, who did not stint the measure of her praise. But there could be no doubt about it, G. Hammerton's eyes might be on the face of another, his conversation for them all, but his desire was with Berenice.

In all his varied career he had never failed so signally. Had the girl designed to drive home her dart she could not have done better. At first the somewhat over-hunted connoisseur had trifled with his regard saying; "I would like to." Now he said, "I will." The failure of every effort at friendship raised his wrath, and the thing grew in him rapidly from wounded vanity to ardour, amity, passion — whatever be the name of the Rust brand of sentiment, sincere enough to make him miserable, sufficiently lasting to approach the

form of a real attachment. Heretofore he had been a free lance taking and leaving, except that one time when he had married, a bright, nice sort of a girl too. There was a strange medley of instincts in the gambler, something in his crass make up answering to refinement.— Perhaps only an impulse to master, possibly a revulsion from the over intimate commonness of his own class. Whatever the influence, the effect on him was the same as in that former case. He wanted Berenice — wanted her so that he would have gone to any mad extreme — even marriage, could it have been, to carry out his purpose. And she would not so much as look at him.

But her coldness could not restore the man's gallantries to their first object. The transient interest of her good natured companion coupled with feminine instinct, was sufficient to bridle at such absolute and undisguised transference of affection. It is humiliating to have an entire household see one jilted, and to know the sometime welcome lover spurned by one's rival kindles the last flame. In losing this friendship Berenice lost also a certain amount of protection. She began really to fear the man, dreading his proximity as a poisonous thing. He lay in wait for her when she went out, and tried to thrust his company on her morn-

ing walks. He hung about for her coming in the evenings. If she rushed to dinner the moment the gong rang, he anticipated her; and if she left her meal till the last he would be still at the table, nonchalant, carelessly elegant, picking his teeth — waiting. This was worst of all, for it meant she was alone, exposed to the advances of one neither particular about the time, nor bashful in the manner of his wooing.

On Sunday he had dogged her footsteps about the house with suggestions of diverse enjoyment, and slammed out darkly when she would have none of him. If Rust did not go away again, Berenice felt she must leave. She dreaded a time of open war between them, and she hated to move — for it must be a move down. Already she was squeezing her resources to their limit to pay for the tiny top floor room she called her own.

Moving, the strangeness of a new place and new people, and the menace of this hateful man, flitted in and out of her mind as she sat with folded hands in the empty room, resting while others ate, for Monday was always a lunchless day following in ascetic discipline the none too excessive amplitude of Mrs. Mede's Sunday feast.

The desertion of noon hour seemed in itself restful. There was a sort of strange joy to Bere-

nice in the sight of the long empty tables, the curtainless, unshaded windows at regular intervals all down one side and end of the room; it reminded her of the refectory at Santa Maria, and the silence carried her away from the trials of the present back to the old life. At this time the place was all her own except for the angular figure of Miss Hearst, head cutter and general factotum, who bent her long flat back over the long table, oddly in keeping with the features of the apartment.

Berenice liked Miss Hearst; brisk, business-like, exacting, self contained, self reliant, one of the driving wheels of the firm, and the only individual in the establishment with whom she felt the slightest sympathy. Lurking under the rough reticence of a too practical personality lay a badly disguised, shamefaced, kindliness that drew the girl's heart. Their relative positions forbade any advance on the part of the new hand, but she watched Miss Hearst, stimulated by her unhesitating, determined action, and from the far corner of the room could detect the sharp click of the large scissors as they moved swiftly and expertly through the rich materials.

All about were piled colour, dainty prettiness, feathery delight, velvets, fur and wool goods; hot

work for such hot days. Silence pervaded, silence and heat, mixed with the sickly odour of fresh trimmings. More and more the dismay of having to move grew on the girl's mind. Such weary trudging of the streets in evening hours, many and long flights to climb, glimpses of disreputable low browed rooms — it meant all this. The change loomed large on the horizon of her fatigue. Life and tribulation stretched interminably into the future to a common vanishing point. Her tired brain sought escape and found no hiding place save in the dangerous echoes of the past. She just permitted herself to glance in memory to the studio with its tranquil joy, and heedless of volition, recollection began to follow the woeful way.

Again she left Robert's darkened house creeping into the night, again stood a vagrant in the court, and lay tormented in the public ward hearing the cries of the other woman's child mocking her loss. Again she raved in fever and then was quiet suffering. Wrapped in her tragic reflection she lost track of time. The hands of the clock showed the hour nearly up; a girl or two straggled in — loitering till the moment for beginning work. Berenice in thought seemed to have reached the sum of life — to be quiet suffering.

Thus intensely preoccupied, oppressed by the

intolerable heat, overcome by the smell of painted ornaments and with body and will unfortified, for she had not eaten since early morning, the girl succumbed once more to the intrigues of mental suggestion. She sank into a state of como, she almost slept. The memory of her child was with her and she dreamed — suffering.

Then imagination in its might arose and slew her. All the old attack followed; the lethargy, the hallucination, the unabashed acting of the drama, the overwhelming moment of recovery, and the pathetic conscious realization. Poor Berenice! Under the eyes of a dozen heartless, gossiping, sentimental, nonsensical girls, she had enacted the role of motherhood. Laying her soul stripped, naked before them, inviting their scorn, owning the shame of shames her shame — at once, in their eyes, explaining her friendless isolation.

There were those who blushed for her disgrace and turned quietly away. But a titter from the opposite bench, and a coarse jest, betrayed the vulgar and spiteful intention of a baser sort, and recalled the touched mind to sensibility. What a recall! Distraught, wild eyed, Berenice turned to the publicity of the open window, and in despair to face the room again.

"Silence!" came the most awful voice of the overseer. At the same instant the loud tongued gong reinforced her command, and the operatives slunk to their places with looks and gestures provocative of fresh amusement.

No kindly protective Madonna welcomed to contrite supplication. Instead a world of mocking familiarity, of faces greedy for her shame, bated Berenice, hemmed her in, suffocated her. It seemed she must die of shame, stabbed by their curious eyes. Nowhere in all the room did a shadow of privacy linger. How to hide, to cover herself, to disappear utterly, to shield herself from their searching, relentless stare? In the distance Miss Hearst's flat back bent tirelessly over the cutting board, and the girl flew to the stern woman crying aloud her need.

"You're not well?" The cutter's tongue clipped out the sentence shortly as though it had caught the habit of clipping from her shears; yet there was no unkindness in her tone. Tears were in the girl's eyes, hot tears of humiliation, and as she shook her head the woman saw the tears terribly near shaking over the brim. By instinct she put out her hand to shield the gorgeous velvet from the contamination of a broken-hearted drop.

"Run along," she commanded, and with an

effort, wrenched as it were unwillingly from her reserve, added, "I wouldn't mind their sort if I was you." With one kindly look at the sufferer she turned again to the urgency of her work, cutting with a savage haste very expertly.

Berenice snatched her hat and ran from the building as a hunted thing runs, never stopping in the long corridors or down the stairs till she was safe outside. Once at large she breathed freely, and turned to survey the ugly pile — her farewell to Cross and Spader. She wondered if Miss Hearst had intended it to be French leave. At least there were no regrets. In quitting the factory, Berenice left nothing but her half day's wages, and she knew she must sacrifice that, for never again could she face those cruelly amused girls.

So violent had been the awakening she felt a physical change also, a consciousness of intense freedom, as though she had been given back the full health of adolescence. The hallucination had fallen from her once for all. In breaking away from the work room she seemed to have lost the horrible deadening bond of her sorrow and grief.

She knew she must leave at once the comfort of Mrs. Mede's for she was out of work, but the change presented no impossible difficulties to her

now. With the remembrance of Rust, joyousness crept into her relief. She would go at once, and take good care to cover her trail. In this thought she was happier than she had been for weeks, and found herself smiling even while the shame still burnt in her cheeks.— Responsibility could not dampen her spirits. She must find work, too, but that would come later, at present it was enough to think of finding a place to live. On one point she had determined, to desert that neighbourhood entirely and to leave no trace for the assiduity of her admirer.

With this idea firmly fixed in her mind Berenice crossed in the opposite direction from her home, and turned up Broadway, stepping resolutely, her old self once more. A natural optimist struggling against odds, and blindly trusting fate for a lead.

XI

THE PLANS A-GLEY

I

Surely the tedious culminates in the docking of ships. Wherever the port, whatever the vessel it is always the same. The seeming stupidity of harbour regulations adds a last woe to the already full cup of the traveller. Days and nights of trouble, induced by the vagaries of an unfamiliar element lead to hours of frustrated expectation and exasperating delay.

At least so it seemed to Robert Lane, with his naturally impatient temperament and his sore need of haste, as he tramped the deck of the liner in blasphemous mood, or loitered at his mother's side, grudging every moment the ship wasted buoyantly coquetting with port authorities off Sandy Hook.

Lane had warred with Fate since his departure, and found her not an enemy fighting fairly on open ground, but a barbarian who gives no quar-

ter, ever ambushed in the thicket of circumstances, waiting to hit a man when he is down. With despicable tactics she had forced his hand. And his shoulders stooped more than ever under her ruthless combination of worry, counter claims and responsibilities.

His father's illness, lingering on to the inevitable, his mother's collapse, the negotiations attending the removal of the body, with the tiresome necessities involved, would have been calamity enough to the aesthete, without the loved woman drawing his heart, Berenice and fatherhood calling him back. Awaiting the coming of death on one hand and anticipating the news of the angel of life on the other, Robert's mind was painfully divided during the first days in Paris.— Both must be soon, soon, he told himself. But the angels delayed.

The strong old man, by whose bedside filial duty commanded Robert, fought his last fight with wonted, stern tenacity. Death summoned him, and he would not. The one who for more than half a century had obeyed no direction but that of his own will dared to defy the signal of Charon. Bartholomew Lane died hard as he had lived, and the woman who had leaned upon him, feeling only the strength of his hardness, collapsed pitifully,

sweetly, like a stephanotis torn from its support. The habit of leaning had grown upon her. Instinctively she felt for the nearest prop and leaned upon her son. It pleased him. All his admiration had been for the valiant old man in the losing fight, and his heart was full for the bereft woman.

"Lean hard, Mother," he whispered to her, drawing the trembling little figure into the circle of his strong arm.

Every action was full of kindly sympathy, his triumph that she did not even suspect how heavily her need afflicted him. For all the time his love was calling; his soul craved sight and touch of Berenice; he was wild with desire to be on the other side of the world.

Impatiently he waited in joy and pain for news. And urged on by apprehension, as day followed day, unbroken and messageless, anxiety gave place to fear, and fear to panic. And still no word came, either from Margaret or from Berenice. Blank silence repelled every effort, till mistrusting the efficacy of science, he raged from one telegraphic company to another. But for all the answer out of that baffling distance, he might as well have stood upon the borders of the ocean and lifted up his voice and called.

Uncertainty applied its own torture, presenting

every possible conception of tragedy. What had happened? Why had Margaret failed him? Was Berenice dead? Hope whispered he imagined a vain thing; in that event he must have heard! — There was some explanation.— Margaret had taken Berenice away from town, out of the heat, out of reach of communication. Letters had miscarried. Yet all the time in his heart he knew it false. They must hear. They must answer! Time passed, and panic gave way to despair. Now in reality, as formerly in that emotional war, his hands were bound and his efforts abortive, while the possible horror in the far country grew side by side with the positive horror of visible death.

When the tedium of the wharfs was over Robert gravely took the little old lady to familiar quarters, forcing his attention to deliberate care through the last moments. He would have wished to be more cheerful for her sake, but thought and suspense overpowered him. Soon he would know the worst.

Free at last, and on the spot, everything else was dashed aside in the consuming desire to find Berenice and his child. He drove furiously to the old house, and not even waiting to pay the cab, rushed up the three flights. Hope sprang in his

heart — he could not help it. The familiarity of the dear place was soothing; it seemed there, in the sacred home of love, she must be waiting for him as of old.

He opened the door on emptiness, the chill desertion of weeks, dust-covered and gloomy, for Frau Gratz had not expected him.

The man drew back, drawing the door quickly shut in his own face. Why had he not spared himself this terrible disappointment? Of course they could not be in the studio at this time of year! — But in spite of wilful belief to the contrary, he felt the worst. Conviction of truth may come sometimes from the appearance of inanimate objects.

Lane rang and rang wildly for Frau Gratz.

"Ach du lieber Gott!" she cried, throwing up her hands. But she could not or would not give him any satisfaction. The lady of whom he had spoken had called?

"Ja wohl! That morning, within two hours of his departure; and Fraulein had gone away." Beyond this he could ascertain nothing. With much shaking of her untidy head, shrugged shoulders, and endless German expletive, she managed to disguise the little she knew. For she had a pur-

pose in admitting nothing, and in this reticence as to the manner of Fraulein's going.

Frau Gratz had not liked the intrusion of Berenice, and knowing full well she had run away, was glad to be rid of her. Not that the caretaker's mind was affected by outraged virtue, a youth familiar with das Nachleben of Berlin left no remnant of blushing propriety. Girls might come and girls might go and the German woman make no comment. She had, in fact, for years marvelled at Lane's rectitude, counselling him against self denial. But it was to her own interests to keep this one from returning. The guilt of theft guarded her replies.

The money left on the table for Berenice had lain just where Robert placed it long after the girl stole away, caring for nothing in her flight. Frau Gratz had seen the bills, coveted and fingered the wealth, climbing the stairs more than once to add the sum of them, and scorch herself in the fire of temptation — finally to succumb. The consequences of her evil act misled Lane, for had he discovered the money he must have known something out of joint in his scheme and possibly would have arrived at an inkling of the truth. But in the love-haunted, love-deserted room he found only the scrap of a letter begun by Bere-

nice, and its message, "All is well with us," comforted him.

Margaret had taken her away. So to Margaret's house therefore he drove, expectant in the tenacity of hope. Again he found his destination forbidding, the blank aspect of closed shutters and a hospitable door barred. He rang repeatedly before getting an answer, and then there came an oldish servant woman who had known him since boyhood, smiling as she opened the door.

"Are you in charge, Hannah? Has Mrs. Nott been away long?"

"Yes, Master — Mister Robert. I forgot how many weeks. They are fishing in Canada."

His face must have changed for she hastened to assure him they would be back soon. Only that morning Hannah had received instructions to forward all mail to the Place Viger Hotel, Montreal. She was just going to do so, she said, when she heard the bell. It was a phrase too familiar in Robert's ears. He knew Hannah and her ways and his heart misgave him, as he asked if there were any cablegrams.

There were several telegrams. She didn't know about cables. Would Master — Mister Robert like to see for himself? Lane stepped into the gloomy hall, while the old woman hurried away,

and returned with a heap of letters overflowing the tray. He turned them over in nervous haste, noting they lay piled according to date as they had come; evidently Hannah had no curiosity concerning her mistress' mail. He found the yellow envelopes he sought, every one. Margaret then had never known his anxiety! All might be well.— He remembered now they had been talking of Canada.

As Robert turned the letters over and over fumbling for the foreign ones, the pile tottered and a good three quarters of them slipped to the floor. There at the bottom lay an unstamped envelope in his own hand writing, and, yes, it was unopened.

"Hannah," he asked sharply, "when did they leave town?"

His tone made her jump from collecting the fallen mail and collect her wits instead. She tried to think looking at him fearfully.

"On the sixteenth, sir. The master wasn't well."

"Then what is this doing here? I sent it myself, by special messenger, on the fourteenth."

"Miss Margaret was away — she had gone to Boston."

"She didn't return! And you didn't forward it!"

"I forgot, sir,— I — I was just going — "

"Hannah! Hannah!"

She stopped at his cry knowing something was wrong. The old servant hung her head, but Lane said no more. Before he was born his mother had scolded Hannah for neglectfulness; if then the family continued to employ her — what was there to say?

One more call he made, at the house of the nurse. Obviously it must have been she who had gone to the studio and taken Berenice away. He expected the answer — "Absent at the seaside with a patient." That was quite as it should be. Fortified with the address he rushed to the nearest office, and telegraphed inquiry in eager assurance. He could hardly wait for the answer, and had it not been for his mother he would at once have started north. Failing that he drove directly to the studio, fearful lest they should anticipate him.

Here Robert found again the beginning of the letter written by Berenice and kissed the sheet in renewed tenderness.— "True heart, my adored husband." Her own hand had been there. Her faith and love were perfect. He dared now accept the burden of the message — "All is well with us." The last word caused him strange emotion.

He was a father! The short note had been written after, and left there for him. The man's heart was full of joy over his son — he was sure it must be a son.

Berenice, he thought, had lost or forgotten the Paris address. What more likely in the excitement to which she had been subjected? — and she was no more than a child! But he had no time to spend on inferences; he could think only of his son. Sitting in the very place where the mother had last sat, he gave his mind to the wonder of it — he was a father.

There the fatal blow struck him in the ten words of a prepaid answer.— "Have had no communication from Madam. No knowledge of whereabouts."

It meant death! Berenice must be dead or she would not have gone from him so without word or sign. He groped blindly for the scrap of her letter, and the unobserved date confounded him. The fifteenth! The morning he left! — They must both be dead!

Impossibility of any relief or hopeful alternative stared him in the face; a blank compared to which the silence baffling him in Paris was as child's play. He must remain helpless forever, knowing nothing, fearing all things, awaiting the

certainty of death. Berenice was dead! His head fell forward on his arms, and he cried terribly, as a man cries. The sheet of her writing, all that was left to him of love, lay under his cheek, and as his sobs shook the table the little word that had thrilled him swam and was obliterated in his tears.

After a long, long silence the man pulled himself together. A little old lady would be waiting for his return, and — there were things to do. There was a funeral to hold in a distant city, and in this he would not let his mother move.

"It is men's work," he told her firmly, and quietly she gave way before his father's manner. She saw him upset, haggard, broken as he had not been by the first grief in Paris; and her heart was touched that he cared so much.

II

On the day after his return from the melancholy journey, Robert met his cousin coming out of the hotel. She grasped his hand warmly, letting no embarrassment show in her glance, and no shocked surprise leap to her lips at his changed appearance. She saw he was a wreck and com-

manded him home to lunch with her, where she could administer consolation in her own way.

"Mrs. Robinson is with your mother, so she does not need you. Come, do come! Jay is lunching with a theatrical big-wig, and otherwise I'll be all alone."

And Lane gave in to her. Knowing some explanation due, he secretly longed to open his heart and dreaded the ordeal of confession.

"I heard from Aunt in Montreal, and we caught the next train. I feel so badly not to have been with her,— and you too, Bob. You must tell me all about it when we are away from this hurly-burly. I have not been of any use to my friends. That is the worst of the bush! One is absolutely out of everything."

"The best of it, you mean,— at least that is how I feel."

"Poor boy! You have had a terrible time! — I should have been there with you and my little mummy, but she is coming to me tomorrow, I insist. The Holland is comfortable but she will be much better out of an hotel now."

"It is good of you, Margaret."

"Good of me! — To have my own beloved Aunt on a visit."

"Mother will be a thousand times happier, yet

— it brings mourning into your house.— Is it quite fair?"

"Oh, Jasper won't mind. He loves her too, and he is always out, or busy. When one is so lazy in method work takes a lot of time. The curtain raiser has made a hit, and they want a play in the same style. We are beginning to feel very biggity."

"You are wonderful, Peggy. I congratulate you."

"No, no, I am only a sort of steam pressure. There's a delicate mind machine which does the work." She sniffed the park as they drove past. "Oh, Bob! It is good to see the face of civilization again! — And still, we loved the bush. You have never been in Canada? You don't know the many rivers and their many rapids, the smell of the pine trees, the mystery of it! Going on and on and on, slipping down stream in the canoes with hardly the need of a paddle. Only keeping clear in the current watching the glorious panorama glide by. Never knowing what comes next! One feels one is in the very heart of beauty. And lo, beyond the bend, breath is snatched by some more exquisite revelation. So it is, on and on and on forever; carefree, intoxicated with sunshine and flowing water. One had to sing, to shout aloud!

I understand the songs of the voyageurs now — oh, I cannot express it to you, it is so wonderful!"

"You make me want to go and bury myself soul deep in the wilds."

"It would do you good, but I expect you are needed here."

"Yes, there is no chance now. All father's affairs are to straighten out."

His voice was full of weariness and to divert him she plunged again into the theme; indeed she was so full of it she had to speak.

"Bob, imagine you are in a canoe gliding, smoothly, swiftly down a wood-gloomed, overhung river, between rocks and pines, singing, always singing in your heart's ease, with the guides fore and aft like sentinels; steady and unemotional yet full of the place too. You stop singing to listen to the silence. Everything is hushed. The canoe makes no murmur. It is cryptic. Then out of the distance comes a sound growing in volume till it seems to envelope the world. It is the roar of waters; the voice of the rivers in debate! The tumult becomes louder and louder, and one feels the litle craft leap to meet it, riding fast down the oily surface. One has such a sensation of going down, down, at that moment. Objects begin to fly past; it may be a fallen tree or lich-

ened rock — one glimpse, and it is gone! The canoe speeds on — down! The surface of the water is almost an incline, a hill — and one is hurrying, hurrying, hurrying till breath is lost!

"Then there is the crash of the breakers! The river leaps and dashes and swirls, and you are swept into the heart of the great rapid! — Oh, Bob! The intensity of it is beyond words! One's heart stops, I do believe it stops. My eyes were always riveted on that bronze statue in the stern, so steady, so watchful, so alert — everything depended on him. Life even! — But one forgets the risk in the excitement. Jay always made me travel ahead so he could watch me — but what could he have done?"

"You had two canoes?"

"Yes, that is the worst of it; one is always anxious the other may not get through! I would rather a thousand times take the risk in the same. Oh, Jay was so funny in the woods! He tried his bluff on the Indians — imagine it! Those natural born stoics!"

Lane actually laughed with her, and Margaret was pleased at the success of her effort to interest him.

"For hours together those guides do not speak. They sit and paddle and watch. It is the magic

of the unbroken wilderness!" and, she added, shrugging her shoulders, "I'm just a tiny bit glad to be safely back on Fifth Avenue!"

The car stopped with a swift jolt and Robert took her up in almost his old manner. "Aren't its perils as great?"

She laughed. "This is a mighty river, too; but here the whirl and the force are of our own making, and we feel some power of control. There I was all the time afraid something would happen to Jasper. I'm tremendously in love, Bob!"

Seeing his look of pain, Margaret steered the conversation back to the level of commonplace, and not until after lunch, when she had established him in the "comfy" chair of her own bright room, did she open the gates of confidence.

"Now tell me about it.— What has been making these lines in your face?" Leaning forward she traced the lines in his brow and cheek. "This was not only Paris."

"Oh, if you had come back.— How different it would have been!"

"I am so sorry, Robert.— Your note hardly explains itself — But I know I have failed you."

The man buried his face in his hands. It was some time before he spoke.

"I hardly know how to tell you, Margaret. I

— I've behaved like a cad. I am a cad — but I loved her! Oh, I know it isn't any excuse. It ought rather to have been an injunction.— I failed.— I do not wish to cover my weakness — but, Margaret, I tried to play the game. How does the devil find the loose joints of our harness? It was her love overcame me — I wanted so much to be loved, and we loved each other."

Margaret remained silent wondering at Man, and at the individual. She had expected a liaison and he revealed a tragedy, unconsciously with the old plea of the age-old defense "Eve tempted me, and I did eat? Were all men alike?"

Presently he broke out again, struggling under the sense of the injustice of his war with fate. "We were so happy together — and I left her — I had to go to Paris. I had to leave her, do you understand? — Just at the time when everything I have hoped for was to be, they sent for me. I said I wouldn't go but — " His voice ceased.

"Poor, poor Robert. You meant me to love her, to care for her in your place — and I failed you."

"You would have loved her. You couldn't have helped loving her — she was so sweet."

After a long time Margaret spoke. "Is the baby dead too, Bob?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know!"

"I don't know that she — that it is so. I cannot find out what happened. She is — gone."

The woman turned his face up quickly from his hands. "But Robert, if she is not dead — if you aren't sure, why waste time like this? We must find her!"

Lane only shook his head dismally. In the last few days he had tacitly accepted the probability. Berenice must be dead.— What else could keep her from the man she loved? Hope had tricked him before and now he refused to consider it.

"I can't find her, Peggy. No, no — it cannot be. If she weren't dead, she would have sent me word, some news, something."

But the woman put reason aside. She was in her own province again, a comforter, alert and full of resources, and quietly but persistently cheerful.

"It's not like you to be so pessimistic, but I see you are worn out with everything — just done! So I am going to prescribe; first you are to have a cigar, one of Jasper's very best — I'll commit a theft for you, and you may smoke it here. Then you are going to tell me everything, from the very beginning."

He recounted it all to her simply. It did not

take long — so much of their life had been love, there was little to tell. When the story was ended she turned to him with tears in her eyes.

"We must find them Robert."

He blessed her in his heart for that ready sympathy making a friend's sorrow her own, identifying herself in his interests. But he shook a despondent head.

"Have you tried everything? What detective did you consult? Band & Band are said to be infallible."

"I didn't go to a detective. I thought of it — but I have had no time and I — it is a horrid thing. I would much rather find her myself."

She ignored his sentiment. "And the hospitals — have you reports from all of them? If anything — any accident had occurred she would surely be sent to a hospital. Why, Bob, you haven't begun!"

"I'm a simpleton, Margaret. I have done nothing! — you make me see it!"

"You are worn out with much worry, my dear cousin, and you need looking after. Tomorrow when Aunt is here, I will be able to keep an eye on both of you. I don't ask you to come to us, Bob, I know your habits too well."

"Thank you, no. I'll be happier there, in the studio — she might return."

There was a world of pathos in the idea of his waiting, and the woman would have liked to cry; but she stared hard out of the window, rose and adjusted the blind, and stood looking into the street till a vagrant outside caught her eye and reminded her of the lost Berenice. "Oh, Bob, you must go at once, this very afternoon. I am so anxious to begin!"

He cast aside the half finished cigar and joined her, and looking into Margaret's glowing, intelligent face he realized how broad a woman's influence may be — yet the methods simple. Her kindliness had lightened his despondence, soothed him with the remedy at hand, spared him criticism, and better than these, supplied him with a motive, given him the invaluable something to do, an actual warfare to wage against anxiety and hopelessness.

"It was a very good smoke, little cousin, and you are a very good woman."

If only his plans had carried and she had gone to the studio. The thought shot a pang in his heart, and Margaret catching it in his eyes put a hand on either shoulder and gave him her face to kiss.

"The same old Peggy, isn't it?"

"Just the same. And I've been thinking, since I received Aunt's letter, how good even trouble is when it brings one's friends nearer. We drift in calm weather — we all have been drifting farther and farther apart. Let us anchor in the same port now for a while. There will be a place for you at dinner, as long as Aunt is with us. And you must keep me posted."

"Dear old Margaret! It is like you. I must go. I'll go straight to the detective. Good-bye, my cheerful philosopher who makes even loss a gain."

She went with him to the door, and before opening it, he spoke again, slowly, in embarrassment.

"There is one thing I want to ask of you. Don't tell Jasper, at least, not now.— I've been such a rotter. I can't bear to — to have him know!"

Margaret liked to tell things in her husband's sympathetic ear, and was disappointed by the prohibition.

"Jay would understand."

"Yes, perhaps — but he wouldn't have done it, Margaret — not even for love."

That was her gain in the matter. She treasured the words in her heart as she kept Robert's secret inviolate, a bond between them.

XII

THE OUTCOME OF MRS. ALLENBY-HARTE

For several months the little old lady lived tranquilly in her foster daughter's home, and Robert dropped in and out with a long disused intimacy, enjoying the quiet household. Although their secret continued to be jealously guarded, he found no difficulty in keeping Margaret informed. At first there was much to tell — sad news, yet welcome, as certainty is ever welcome. The child was dead, they knew, and Berenice lived. The detectives had made quick work of tracing the girl from her vagrant appearance in the police court to the hospital and work-rooms of Cross and Spader. And from there to Mrs. Mede's establishment. Beyond that all evidence vanished. Berenice had paid her week's board due, taken her things and gone, leaving no slightest clue. Mrs. Mede could give no particulars, in fact, she had made no inquiries, knowledge that a tenant had lost her job being enough to scare that astute woman into acquiescence. For she preferred a

bird in the bush any time to a workless girl in her hall bedroom.

Where knowledge of Berenice stopped, the gossip of the boarding house volunteered conjecture. A young fellow, known to be dippy about the girl, had given up his room the following day. "Gone off together, did she think?"

"Well, no." Mrs. Mede "wouldn't go so far as to say that," though she had heard since "the girl was a bad one." — "She didn't seem to take any stock in the man. But, there, you never could tell with the boarders, some were so underhand in keeping their affairs to themselves!"

This was hard news for Robert. Berenice alive and well, and not in communication with him! He could not understand it. Each reported fact added to his distress, and a new fear, a new pain grew in him. Through the ardour of his own affection had he mistaken the child's feelings? Had she never really loved him, and seized her freedom gladly? He remembered how she had put him from her saying, "Go, Ruberto, you have no time to waste," and the thought became torture. Yet what other explanation was left of her flight and persistent silence. Even so he could not make out the manner of her going, the cause of her destitution.

He said nothing of these misgivings, fearing Margaret might think him distrustful of Berenice, which he was not, he told himself a thousand times. Lane depended on his cousin throughout the trying weeks, and she sustained him with deliberate optimism. Berenice alive, their search became only a question of time. The social woman made light of a detective's over zeal in boarding house gossip, maintaining, as from the first, that things would come out all right in the end.

Except that he walked with a heavier stoop and the lines wore more deeply into his face, Robert was not changed to them; hardly more taciturn than he had grown in latter years. Apart from the search, his time was fully occupied in setting his father's affairs in order; and for this necessary occupation Margaret gave thanks.

Old Bartholomew Lane's private interests had been many and diverse, and he had been deeply concerned to the end in the affairs of his country. On account of both claims Robert was constantly out of the city, a go-between that lesser place where ideas had fermented in a gigantic brain, and the incubator of national law in Washington. Discoveries made among his father's papers amazed him, till, at times, in the family circle, he grew expansively enthusiastic over the old man.

"I am only beginning to realize what a tremendous power Dad wielded," he announced at dinner, on his return from a closeted interview with Senator Harte. "It seems they were not content with the scheme alone, but depended on him for instructions in procedure. They're lost without Father! As the situation opens up the whole party are at sea.— If Allenby-Harte pulls the bill through now, he's a bigger man than I think. Fancy his being all the time only a sort of mouthpiece, playing Aaron to the Pater's Moses! —and none of us guessed it!"

During one of these hurried visits to Washington in the beginning of the year, the Senator buttonholed Lane after the caucus with a — "Do me a favor, Robert, dine with us tonight." And seeing refusal in the other's eye hurriedly continued.

"There's a big-wig coming and the Right Reverend has failed us at the last minute. I cannot for the life of me see that it matters sitting down odd in number,— but you know what women are! I promised to bring somebody, and the Missus will be upset if I don't." — He stopped to consult an ostentatiously large gold watch.— "It's after seven! Dear me, dear me — she won't like it!"

In appearance Allenby-Harte was an ineffectual man, a human being who in the division of quali-

ties had come out second best. He was lean, weathered to the bone, proof one would have said against even domestic tempests. His face shone saffron, hardly needing a razor to keep it smooth, and his scant hair had turned from drab to badger-grey without adding a single point of dignity or distinction. "Chinese Harte" they had called him years before in the press room of the "Topeka Evening Star," and Chinese Harte he still looked. Nervousness of manner accentuated his physical defects, and to the uninformed observer he passed as a nonentity. Yet withal he had his endowment, in rare measure, for the gift of oratory was his. Masked behind that unimpressive personality lay the electrifying power to sway the minds of men. On his feet, addressing the house, Allenby-Harte was a force. Then his mild eyes flashed with the fire of enthusiasm and kindled his hearers; his speech moved the people. For this quality alone Bartholomew Lane had chosen his representative, and Robert, now confronted with the hesitating timidity of the man, marvelled again.

He was sorry for the Senator. He fancied him returning, unsuccessful, to the ordeal of Mrs. Allenby, irate in the excitement of a smart dinner, and guessing a little of what that one woman could be, judged his friend pathetically inade-

quate to the situation — and he liked Harte. Suddenly Lane was moved to unpremeditated self-sacrifice.

"All right, I'm with you. It's not my line you know — now. But for the occasion — what time?"

"Thank you, Robert, thank you! It's real friendly of you.— I feel like Mahomet — eight o'clock — yes, I feel I have moved mountains!"

He shook the other's hand, beaming with the satisfaction of having done well; and of this Mrs. Allenby, portentous in velvet and lace, assured him later.

"Robert Lane! — Well, I must acknowledge, William, for once you have surprised me! You couldn't have done better!"

"Out Caesared Caesar, eh!" the little man rubbed his hands gleefully. "Ah, you don't know what social possibilities may be hidden in me."

"They are taking a long time to come out, Dad. Do let me fix your tie! What's the sense of having a valet if you don't let him dress you? There!"

It was his youngest daughter of whom he was proud; and she was fond, yes, and proud of him too, in her way, and she gave his tie a loving little pat as a finish, ignoring her mother's remark.

"It looks well when your father travels — 'Senator Allenby-Harte and manservant.'"

"He's a confounded nuisance! I tell you, Maria, the man knows more than I do — he embarrasses me! I wish you'd get rid of him."

"I wish you'd call me Marie. It isn't much to ask, I'm sure, after all the years I've been a faithful wife."

"Why that's the difficulty, Maria — Marie. It sounds so unnatural. The name I made love to you with is the name for me. I wanted to hear you called Maria Harte — and in Topeka you were always Maria Harte. That's my idea of a pretty name — Maria."

"It's not fancy enough for mother now; in Washington one can't be called Maria. Isn't Louisa down? I'm about famished! I'm sure it must be past eight, and I call it rude even if he is a prelate."

"Hush!" cried Louisa, entering, and to her father, "For goodness sake, don't mention Topeka at dinner. Maud Thresher is coming and she can't stand it now she has married an earl's brother.— You know what they were!"

Mrs. Allenby-Harte radiated complacence for she had not hoped to fill up so well. Although hardly a great man Lane was far on the way to

distinction. People talked about him; and his name, professionally familiar to the many, had once figured in the most exclusive social ring, not as the son of a western judge; his mother was a Van Brunt. To present at her table one who could so seldom be persuaded to appear would be in itself a score. She ran over the list of her guests quickly, reassuring herself of success, yet it seemed later that she trembled on the brink of failure.

These gatherings look best in the society columns where titles show in all their glory, and a potentate may be exploited without regard to personality. But in the flesh the cardinal was a heavy individual, concentrating his attention on the material side of the feast; the two senators present, worn out with the affairs of state, contributed nothing; their wives were everywhere classed among the unavoidable inflictions of a married society; even the brother of an earl, cast disastrously adrift from the conversational topics of his own class, tended toward silence. And the head of the house having so long been bullied by his family, hardly dared to open his mouth. The chagrined hostess felt Robert Lane, reputed a silent man, to be her last hope; but she knew him of old as brilliant if once started. One who

could talk if he would. So she jumped the conversation from international politics where it threatened to ground in subsiding interest, to his own subject.

"I have purchased a new Constable, my dear Mr. Lane, which you must see. It is too perfectly charming!"

Robert, knowing her collection, had not a doubt of the exact truth of her statement, and with a mental reservation that old Constables were good enough, murmured, "Delighted."

"Are you painting any portraits now?"

"I rarely touch them. A portrait painter's life is the life of a dog, that is from the artist's point of view. He is subjected to so much absurd criticism."

"Isn't that what I say, mother! When people don't know anything about a subject, they always make fools of themselves trying to show off. And so many ugly people are painted too, I can't imagine why! — Some of Rembrandt's old men are simply hideous!"

"But still Rembrandts," Robert interjected.

"I am sure I could never stand any of them on my walls!"

"Dear child! Her feeling for the beautiful is marvellous, marvellous, Mr. Lane. Her tem-

perament prohibits the least hint of vulgarity or — or — ugliness to intrude. So delicate, so artistic! We are thinking of sending her abroad to study. One cannot wonder at a young girl not appreciating the — roughness of the old Italian. Of course I think those wonderful portraits of himself in Florence quite without an equal."

"Yes, yes, no doubt.— You admire Bougereau, Miss Harte?"

"And Henner! I adore Henner! And Mr. Lane, don't you think it is the first duty of a portrait painter to flatter his sitters?"

Robert laughed, liking her sincerity. "If he wants to be a success with the ladies, certainly. You will understand the man who allowed all good-looking ancestors to remain in place and sent the others to the nearest dealer."

"Oh, ancestors are different, I suppose."

"It matters so little a hundred years later whether one's grand-aunt really looked so or not if she is a charming blossom on the family tree. People always disagree about the likeness of portraits — as I have learned to my cost."

"Now Mr. Lane you are making fun of me!"

"I am perfectly serious, I assure you. The painter is at a disadvantage because he can only reproduce a single phase out of the complexity

of nature, and it is sure not to be the phase known to some one or other of the sitter's friends. Have you never seen a portrait, or even a photograph, of an intimate friend that came with a sort of revelation?"

"Then if one wants to judge the person fairly a whole album of photos would be necessary — snap-shots at that!"

"Unpoetical but true! If you insist on snap-shots, Miss Harte we will be forced to fly from ourselves!"

"The illustrated supplements now-a-days are enough to wreck anybody's vanity," the Honorable Algernon volunteered. "Cowes' week or the races. By jove, they are jolly ridiculous!"

"Well, if you want to see something funny you can't beat the tin-types we used to have taken in Topeka. Maria, where's that old album of yours?" Encouraged by his recent proof of social prowess the host dashed in, to founder between Louisa's wrathful glance and his youngest daughter's surreptitious joy.

Maud Crew smiled at him down the table. "We have some of them, one with you and father. It really is very amusing."

There now! What were the girls talking about? Didn't Maud acknowledge the old town

straightaway. Senator Harte felt himself at ease in his own house, and he wanted to show his proprietory right in Robert, to play the limelight on his special turn, so he continued.

"Everybody is quick at running the old place down, but it has some fine things in it all the same; that reredos of Lane's for instance, in the Church of the Ascension."

Mrs. Allenby gasped. He had plunged them right back into the middle of a worn out subject. Painting threatened to become a conversational sargasso, but Topeka held worse peril. To her relief her dependable eldest daughter snatched the remark, dismembered it in a lightning flash, and presented the artistic essence of it in her reply.

"Ah, yes, that exquisite Madonna. We have all wondered, Mr. Lane, where you found such a beautiful woman."

"She was a chorus girl in New York before her translation." Robert spoke shortly under the effect of the sudden and painful reminder.

"A chorus girl! The last thing on earth! I am completely disillusionized. Are not all chorus girls vulgar?" She dropped the subject with a little shrug but Mrs. Crew took it up.

"The face of the angels is more wonderful I think. Did you not paint them all from one

model, Mr. Lane? If not this an example of the various mood, the complexity of nature? I have felt many emotions in it, and I could not decide the nationality. Will you be good enough to enlighten my curiosity?"

"An Italian girl."

Only so much! Mrs. Allenby groaned inwardly. He might have added something, have enlarged on it in some way. The topic was full of possibilities — at least for her. She caught her daughter's eye and both smiled.

"There is a very odd coincidence about that painting," the dependable one began. "In Naples we ran across the girl disguised as a young man."

"The angel model? How interesting! Do tell us."

Robert's violent start and strained attention were overlooked as all turned toward Miss Harte for the story, and she to her mother. Louise had given a trained lead to a favorite bit of gossip, the oft-told tale of Jasper Nott and the girl in Bertolini's, and waited, for it was her mother's privilege to take up the thread. And the affair was almost irresistible to Mrs. Allenby-Harte. It would fill up — how it would fill up! Yet she hesitated. It is one thing to remind friends of an old scandal, another to relate it in the ears of

a Prince of the Church. Then, in horror, she remembered Margaret le Hunt's stay with the Threshers in Paris, and that Lane was probably on terms of intimacy with the Notts.

"Two years ago," her daughter added lamely. Conversation came almost to a standstill, and Lane's face relaxed to disappointment.

"And you recognized her again in the picture? Strange, but it must have been so — one could never forget the face."

"Nor the red head," chuckled the host.

"Red, Senator, how can you! It is perfect Titian, Mr. Lane."

"You flatter me, Madame." It was more tersely said than he intended, his bow more ironically pronounced, for Lane was suffering.

Mrs. Crew smiled back at him pleasantly; if he found a compliment in her sincere little attempt at art talk she was glad.

"One doesn't often hear of red haired Italians," her husband suggested. "Did you paint the thing here, Lane, or abroad?"

"Here. I — in New York."

So far Cardinal Rienzi had found the conversation less interesting than the entree. But he looked up at Lane's answer, and immediately addressed Miss Harte.

"How long ago did you say! — in Naples?"

"Two years, wasn't it mother? Two years ago March."

"Well if this is the same girl she didn't let the grass grow under her feet! You must have painted it very soon after that, Robert, I remember the dedication service when it was put in place, and a stir it made in the old town. We were proud of you, proud of you!"

But the artist could not be induced to talk on the subject, and Mrs. Allenby struggled again with the launching of a topic, while all the time the guest on her right continued to murmur. "April, Naples, New York, red hair, two years." She thought the man must be mad, he was certainly impossible as far as conversation went, for he suddenly turned to her husband with.

"Where did you say this reredos is to be seen?" and as abruptly to her, asking assurance of the date. Whereupon the hostess smiled a weary, non-committal, social assent.

"Quite sure of the girl and of the date. It was in March, just after the great storm, two years ago."

At last she had her reward for one word vibrated in the old man's memory. His heart had ached over that devastation of his beloved coun-

try, and his speech became graphic of her tribulations. Under the inspiration of the theme he changed from the hopelessly wordless diner-out, to a centre of animated narrative, working backward from the woes of Italy to her periods of eminence, and Mrs. Allenby took a respite. She used it to study Robert Lane, wondering how much of the Naples episode he remembered, how much he had heard, and if his sympathies were with Margaret? She had always intended to mention the identity of his model, to find out something about the girl, but now from his manner she judged it wiser not to try.

Robert recollected the story, the occasion of a quarrel between Helen and Margaret, had summed it up to himself as womanish and dismissed it. Now he began to think of the American version as vouched for by his present hostess. He could not at once realize it was Berenice, his child-woman, his dream-woman, his beloved, so pure and innocent, of whom they spoke; could not believe it was of her these worldly gossips, mother and daughter, exchanged that knowing smile. Berenice the leading figure in a miserable scandal used to annoy a man about town! Rage seized him. He wanted to contradict it, to cry out the contradiction. He felt he wanted to break things;

and he sat silent while Mrs. Allenby-Harte affirmed her conviction of the identity.

After his anger came dismay. Here was startling proof of secrecy, for she had not told him, and this knowledge hurt. Robert forgot how much of her story he had lost through limited understanding of the language, forgot his preoccupation with happiness, forgot he had not invited confidence, nor pressed her for an explanation, nor told her of his own past life, but had been content to live from day to day, drinking the ever full cup of present joy. How could he have imagined a past for such a child? Now he looked back over it he knew nothing of her, but when she said she had been put on the ship at Naples he was satisfied. On the lips of Berenice from the convent to the ship had been sufficient — yet the thing was skeleton. Ah, it was Berenice had blinded him! When present she herself so fully satisfied him, there was no place left for question.

Throughout the long dinner Robert was obliged to talk platitudes with these thoughts forming a tragic background to the social farce. And when the farce ended, the action of the tragedy began. Unhappiness grew in him after he left the house. Little by little he recollected details of the story, and he could not free his mind from it. How

came Berenice and Jasper to be together in a smart hotel in Naples — and Berenice in men's clothes too? Ready as he had been to establish his friend's character a short time before, jealousy staggered belief, and the strength of his love gave him greater concern. Nott was but human, and who could withstand the delicious charm of Berenice. Lane knew the thought false, and he threw the untruth from him, but it crawled back and coiled ready to strike afresh, while the man tortured himself in reminiscence seeking excuse for his idol's reticence. He named it reticence aloud, in so doing to cast out the harsher word, for he would not acknowledge he had been deceived. And the old misgiving, which had been eating into his heart for weeks, ran to meet this new doubt and clasping hands with it, danced incessant question to his discouragement. Why, why did not Berenice come to him if she loved him? Could she love him still, had she ever loved him? Could he ever have had her love without her confidence?

Robert longed to tell Margaret of his discovery, his overburdened heart craving the relief and reassurance of her sympathy, always sure to minimize his woe. Yet he was afraid he might betray distrust of Nott, and began to wonder if the incident should be mentioned at all. How could he

speak of Margaret's husband? What could he say? At the same time he realized how much he wanted his confidante to know, and in the end found himself just mentioning it as a coincidence.

Jasper Nott's wife was amazed, interested, and — that was all. Robert had not counted on her perfect faith, and her attitude impressed him shamefully with his own shortcoming, the miserable meanness of his jealousy. He hardly heard her first words.

"Why, Bob, how extraordinary! Our Berenice the little girl Jay helped to skip Naples, about whom Mrs. Allenby-Harte made such a tempest in a tea-pot! Are you sure? I must tell Jay — May I?"

He hesitated perceptibly, Nott will naturally want to know all, being the thought uppermost. For his shame's sake he clung to secrecy, and he could not bear to think of them discussing the matter. Then Margaret's kindness and unflagging interest presented itself clearly, imperatively to his mind, and he turned aside the issue with a question. "Has he not seen the reredos?"

"No, neither of us have seen it." Disappointment showed in the reply. She was thinking Robert could be very trying at times. Since Jasper had been first to befriend Berenice, surely

he might be trusted with her secret. At least what harm would it do to tell him the girl had sat as the angel model? Her woman instinct pleaded the latter argument, and Lane giving in gave generously.

"Tell him, Margaret, tell him everything. You have been a true friend to bear my troubles so long. Knowing how close you and Jasper are to each other I should have seen that I was very selfish." The lonely man carried a vision of her gratified look and assent out into the street with him. Sometimes the atmosphere of their home life made emptiness doubly terrible.

"I've got some news!" she called, hearing Jasper's step.

"And see what I've got!" he replied, entering with a hand on Paul Solomon's shoulder.

"Paul — you dear!" Margaret gave him both her hands. "When, how and where did you arrive? We imagined you in London or some place on the other side of the world, and here you walk in.— Is it a dream?"

"More likely a manifestation of the astral body."

"Or better still, a nice, comfortable, living reality ready for a cup of tea and a chat as in the old days. I am so glad to see you!"

"And how is my daughter of Pharaoh? Has she a glance for her husband?" Jasper asked, kissing her.

"Poor pussy. Good boy!" She gave his shoulder a little pat. "You have brought a perfectly lovely surprise."

"Are you two perpetuating a former incarnation?"

"Of course, Jay was my sacred cat years ago. Look at his eyes if you doubt it." Margaret laughed. "And you, Paul, must have been Pharaoh himself for you are second to none."

"Blarney, blarney, my fair lady! You know I was more likely Moses consorting with brickmakers."

"Moses the terrible who coerced Pharaoh! By Jove, Solomon, I am ashamed of your modesty! Besides we aren't sure of the dynasty."

Paul smiled with them, but in Margaret's home he could not help feeling the analogy; had he not seen the promised land and been forbidden to enter. Perhaps something of the thought reached the others for the subject dropped.

"You paraded news, Margaret, and you have kept it now for five minutes, an impossible virtue. Come — we wait. I see from your manner, which

is mysterious in spite of your efforts to make it otherwise, that the facts are momentous."

"You are a credit to the family, Jay, for every point is entirely right, showing your customary acumen. But curb your ardour, or necessity shall curb it for you.— I am not going to tell my secret."

"A secret! Insidious deceit! Why wreck a happy family? Tell it, much better tell it. Follow the advice of that far-reaching commercial dodger and 'Do it now' — then I can profit too."

"I say Paul, you would make a ripping villain. Top hole for my comedy!"

"Villain! How so? I am advancing the most moral sentiments. I'm saving your home from utter ruin."

"Just the thing! Modern villains are always moral and sentimental and all that; and a rum lot of trouble they can make too. The problem play is only a topsy-turvy-dom of old melodrama. Damned funny! — I beg your pardon."

"Have some cake old boy, you always swear when you're hungry." Margaret shook her head at him playfully firm.

"There, you see the beginning of these affairs. The loving husband shut out from his wife's confidence imagines a skeleton, if not already in the

closet, then shivering around the corner. He demands. She refuses. He insists. She resents. In the end they quarrel about nothing and the house falls. I believe more communities have been blown to shreds by the working leaven of a secret than have fallen by bombs. By Jove, you know, a confidence is a most dangerous combustible that should be laid a long way off and guarded, but when a woman has one she cannot resist teasing it."

"Does she tease the secret or the man's curiosity?"

Paul smiled. "Necessity being the mother of invention, cannot a little fib, always allowed the ladies, avert catastrophe?"

"I foretold your subtilty. Would you build my house upon the sand?"

"Well, the sand may hold for years, and one will need a modern mansion sooner or later. I believe the villain is right. But you had better solace yourself with the sour grapes of philosophy, my dear Jay, for this is a real cracker-jack of a secret."

"And you will never hear it from Margaret. I have known her longer than you, Nott. She is playing her mouse in full comprehension of her own strength."

"All the more unprincipled. And I say, it's bad enough being the family cat, sacred or not, I'm hanged if I will come down to a mouse! What brought you back so soon, Solomon. Business. Did you see anything, anybody?"

"Business, of course, it is my bug-bear! I hardly more than landed, you know, but I found some fine intaglios, and I have heard of some from Hamsworthy since my return. Thanks, Margaret,—let me do it. Now you must tell us about the play, how is it progressing?"

Friendly gossip of this and that swung them away from the subject most keenly alive in Margaret's mind, and after Paul's farewell Nott started another equally engrossing.

"I wonder if Solomon will ever marry. I heard some talk of an English woman hunting him; perhaps she drove him out!"

"Any girl would jump at marrying Paul!"

"I know one who didn't," Jasper said pulling her down onto the arm of his chair.

"He never asked me," she rejoined, whispering, "I didn't let him, I liked him far too much."

"Well old girl, I'm glad you liked me just a little bit less. Now we are comfortable, tell me the news."

"Do you remember the fuss Mrs. Allenby-

Harte made about a little youngster in Naples? She has turned up here, but it is rather sad."

"What a rum thing! Do you know positively? Tell me," he urged.

While Margaret told the story Nott smoked, gazing steadily into the fire, and when she had finished he said without looking up. "Allah illa Allah, my wife is the most wonderful woman in the world!"

"Jay, you are tantalizing; cannot you be the least bit surprised over it!"

"Surprised! My dear, I'm simply flabbergasted! And I am humiliated also. I should never have sent that little child out of Naples. In a way it is all my fault.— And poor Lane! I have wondered why you and he were putting your heads together in corners. Poor chap! How could you keep it, Margaret? You are rare."

Their kind hearts were full of sympathy at the unfortunate issue of the Neapolitan incident, and they planned to draw the principal sufferer more into their lives, away from loneliness and the studio.

Robert had returned there on leaving Margaret, and had dined unhappily by himself, given up to his own society and grevious thoughts. While his friends decided on one course he resolved the

opposite. People only made things harder. He regretted having told, hated his affairs to be discussed, and was angry that he had ever gone to Mrs. Allenby-Harte's dinner, resenting its outcome as keenly as the Cardinal and a certain Father Nicolo were at the same hour congratulating themselves on the knowledge thus acquired.

Many weeks before, Father Nicolo had called upon the Prelate with letters from high authority requesting that all help should be given to the bearer in furthering the purpose which had induced him to leave his native country. But Washington is a far cry from Rome, and the influence of the Papal Legate for a long time offered no more than courtesy and forms of office to the special messenger. On the day after Mrs. Allenby's dinner, however, he sent for the old priest; and, as a result of the interview, that black skirted figure, and a brisk youth in tweeds, travelled northwest by the night express.

The two wasted no time over the beauties or ambitions of Topeka, but drove directly to the Church of the Ascension. Their despatch in viewing the reredos by Robert Lane was mistaken as a tribute to the artist by the old woman who sold photographs of the town sights, and who decided a world had begun to travel in his honour, feeling

her pockets already full with promise of increase, for the men bought every specimen of the painting she had to sell.

"Unmistakable," the one in black murmured, while the man in grey paid for and carefully stowed away the several cards. And the two energetic visitors straightway departed from Topeka, leaving no record of their visit save in the hope of an old woman.

Father Nicolo, who had for many years past read vespers and heard confession at the Convent of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, dined the following evening with Cardinal Rienzi, in the happy conviviality of those whose enterprises flourish. For it was months since the Church had traced Berenice to New York, as far as the landing place; from where she had seemed to vanish. And Father Nicolo was about to give up the search when this unexpected clue pointed them to success.

The face in the reredos witnessed unmistakably; no chance resemblance could have persisted throughout the various positions of the head. And surely an artist must be able to give some information concerning the whereabouts of a model so constantly before him.

So the lesser and the greater churchman drank

their wine together, hopeful of immediate discovery; while the detective followed Lane to New York, and hunted out the old house in Washington Square.

XIII

THE PERMANENCE OF PERSONALITY

The detective did not find Robert Lane, for a short time before that discerning person waited upon him, the artist had received a summons which he felt constrained to obey. The message was from his wife, asking for an interview, and the matter of it he was in mind to reject had not the form touched deeply his sense of responsibility. It was only a page meagerly worded, written by her private secretary and chaplain, stating, after the brief request, that Mrs. Lane was not expected to recover from the illness then prostrating her.

Robert was equally moved by the news and upset by the demand. No communication had passed between them since the formal separation years before. He did not even know of her illness. He could not fancy Helen ill, confined to bed, helpless. As the train pounded over the rails, his mind teemed with strange reminiscences, startled from dead years like a swarm of bats, and in their

flight as aimless. Old resentment was drowned in pity, shocked and exorcised by the advent of death. He was kind in thought of the sufferer, more generous in excuse than he had been before; yet he was reluctant too, not understanding the summons so unlike Helen. The seeking of this interview must imply a tremendous change, a breaking down. Reconciliation could be nothing but a farce, and Lane hated mummery. He was humanely prepared to be lenient toward the dying woman whose present affliction must outweigh past failure, but he would have preferred her to maintain impersonal dignity to the end, since it was the best he knew of her.

It was indeed unlike Helen Lane to seek a reconciliation — nothing could have been farther from her mind. Even in the last hour she sent for Robert as a convenience, sacrificing his feelings to the serving of her own purpose in gaining certain information that she might lay to her credit one more service for her beloved Church. For this and nothing else she importuned him, using the wile of her pitiable state to influence his sympathy.

Helen was reckoned a devout woman. For many years her money and her time had been undividedly at the service of religion, but for this

she had a reason — a reason running through all the dread undercurrent of her life. She knew herself to be a coward, a woman who in cowardly self-protection had persistently defied Nature, denied her husband, and disobeyed the commandments of the Church, and who now paid heavily the claims of all. She was come to the boundary of middle age alone, and in all her loneliness Nature had stricken her sorely.

And if already in this life the punishment began, what of the next? Spiritual panic fastened on her. Fear of the stubbornly disregarded principle of her religion gnawed her conscience, devouring the sweetness of life, as the essence of it was being devoured in her body, steadily, mercilessly, the evil waxing stronger and stronger to her undoing from the vitality which she could not withhold. Herein lay the secret of her righteousness. It began and ended in fear; and the world counted it devout that the Church crushed and extracted and harvested while a selfish, debased, poverty-stricken soul cringed and sacrificed to an offended God.

Helen regretted continually that she had not remained in the Convent of Santa Maria. In those days she had discussed it with Father Nicolo, had gone as far as planning the retirement, but

the habit of life proved too strong for her impulse. And now her fear-tormented mind reverted continually to the rest, the silence and friendliness of the convent life. To the calm of morning and high noon and evening, to the quiet chapel and the pleasant places of the garden with its terraced face toward the sea.

Unexpectedly one day the gentle Priest, so much in harmony with the Italian Convent, called on the American woman in her own garden overlooking the Hudson River and she welcomed him with sincere delight. Helen, in turn, made him free of her pleasant places and Father Nicolo was grateful for such a retreat from the foreign turmoil and bewildering activity of the cities where he was bound to conduct his search.

When September laid a beautifying hand upon the scene, and robed the land in colour, decking her as for a fête, and so led her to October and left her resplendent in his embrace, the priest and poet came often and more often to revel in the mystery of God among the hills. And from week to week the invalid made him doubly welcome. Even after the encroaching power of disease forced Helen to spend her time in bed, this one visitor was welcome. Through the long days she looked forward only to seeing Father Nicolo. His pres-

ence reassured, breathing beatitude and kindly joy, and the sweetness of the voice in which he said, "my daughter" was more to her than absolution. It was as though he wrapped her isolation warmly in the folds of a protective affection.

They spent long afternoons together; the sufferer reclining on her pillows while, to entertain her, the priest told of his travels in America and the purpose of his journey. Helen remembered the young novice, and the sensation of the girl's disappearance, freshly agitating the convent during her retreat. One of the sisters had let the secret slip out, and considering the enormity of the affair, the worldly woman, accustomed to general gossip, marvelled that more had not been said.

Father Nicolo smiled over her view of it. "Our rules of silence are strict, naturally, for the sake of the example, we do not want such things talked about there. The Mother Superior, who is a wise woman, in this instance proved over discreet, and during the time she wasted applying for directions the girl made good her escape: we cannot imagine how. As far as we know she was unaided, but she eluded our pursuit. We have been seeking for her ever since."

"Why? — Are you so anxious to find her? Is it worth the trouble?"

"We are doubly bound to find her. Because she is our ward and the time of our guardianship has not yet expired, but more than that, she is destined to become a member of our holy order; already half pledged to the life, though such vows are not irrevocable as they are not inviolable."

"Yes, yes, irrevocable — that is the pity of it!" Helen spoke half to herself with fretful intonation. If the priest caught her words he let them pass for the mood of an ill woman. His own sentence had been spoken tonelessly as a recited lesson. Now he leaned forward speaking in a confidential voice and with a live interest in his subject.

"The safety of this young woman is of great consequence to us all; in fact the head of our order in Rome is himself deeply concerned, having, to a certain extent, gone surety for her protection. The Cardinal looked upon her not as a ward, but the keystone of a far reaching influence. We speak of the girl as an Italian, but she is half English, half Russian, the daughter of a too well known personage. Much care had to be exercised when the father came to see the child, which he did until

accession made it an impossibility. He proved his affection for her, however, before then by settling an inheritance on her, which, augmented by gifts from the mother from time to time before her death, amounts to a considerable fortune. It is an old story now; and we, that is the Mother Superior and I, who are the only ones at Santa Maria who know the secret, had almost forgotten it.— Life is restful there, my daughter." The old man sighed.

"What life does the world offer to a young woman in such a position? An outcast from class, and with all the instincts of her ancestry, and the sole disposal of a large amount of money? Believe me, it was not without considering all these circumstances that I persuaded — yes, I will assume the responsibility of the decision,— I persuaded the girl to join us. There were no restrictions against her becoming a religeuse. Might we not suppose it was her father's desire in placing her with us, was it not the likeliest happiness for her as well as the certain preservation of her precious soul? She always seemed contented with us there, and we are at a loss to understand what desire carried her out into the world. An inherited instinct perhaps, these things go very deep, much deeper than we generally admit — yes, it is

strange! She was happily childish — I would have said without guile."

"Who would not be happy at Santa Maria!" The voice was full of wistfulness. "I wonder why she left? Did she know all you have told me? Perhaps others knew; the girl must have been worth kidnapping."

"That is possible in America, but not with us; besides we should have known, we must have heard if anything of the sort occurred in the countryside. We are a deserted community, as you have seen; even a carriage on the road occasions remark. No, we feel sure the idea must have sprung from her own mind. She had been asking questions but the Mother Superior did not think the time had come to explain, so the girl knew nothing of her position. We did not wish the thought or knowledge of the world to turn her mind from God."

Again the priest's voice became a toneless singsong, as of one speaking without conviction that sound may rebuke self-suspicion. He was an earnest old man, and he made himself believe that in strongly influencing a child to take the vows of the Church, in ignorance of all they curtailed, he had acted for her best, and not only according to the known wish of the Holy See.

The sick woman gazed out to the silent river and seemingly beyond; in her eyes lay the translucent intelligence peculiar to those who look death in the face, but she made no assent to his remark, immediately, no protest against unfairness. When she spoke it was rather with the abstraction of one considering the universality of Fate.

"Then she made a blind choice."

"Blind! Do you say blind? Had she not the guidance of the Church? Is its light of no account?"

An unusual edge, argumentative, almost antagonistic, roughened Father Nicolo's voice. For he had loved the little Berenice, and deep within could neither forgive nor justify himself, yet knowing how insistent the directions from Rome had been concerning her he had acted in accordance with his clear duty as a priest. But his hearer was sunk in reverie and the momentary rancor passed unnoticed. When Helen spoke again it was bitterly, with aloof sadness, giving expression to her own thought rather than replying to his.

"After all, are we not like sheep, do any of us ever make other than a blind choice!"

"Perhaps so; the law of compensation is the rule of life. But Sister Berenice, by running

away into the world, made her second choice more blindly, did she not?"

"She may be happy — she may gain."

"How? What can she gain? What shall a man exchange for his soul?"

"And she will have to pay. We all have to pay, to the uttermost. I wonder if you will ever find her."

"It is imperative that we find her soon. So far we have kept her flight secret — you understand — for our own sakes, for the convent example. But the time of our guardianship draws to a close, and the date on which it expires will precipitate an exposure. Her father's representatives will demand an interview with the girl, and if she is not to be seen, if we confess she is not with us, ah, you see the complication. The Cardinal will not have justified his trust. We hoped she would have been back at Santa Maria, happily, quietly — then nothing need have been said of the matter. But our efforts are continually frustrated, and her absence is almost sure to become known. It would be a great thing for the Church, a great service, to take her back, willingly, you understand, happily, to Santa Maria."

Helen opened her lips to speak, and shut them again, and turning to ascertain if her companion

had observed it, found his eyes fixed on the river. Eagerness sparkled in their aging depths, and his thoughts betrayed themselves:

"It must be hundreds of thousands of liras now.— A great thing for the Church."

The dying woman's mouth went very hard and straight. So strained was her longing for reassurance she was willing for any service to religion, and had been on the point of giving information. But the very anxiety which impelled her acted also as a detective scepticism. Father Nicolo's ill-advised remark struck too sharply a contradiction of his moral platitudes. For the first time she mistrusted the priest, and she decided to wait.

Helen Lane had willed her entire fortune to the Church, this way and that, for the redemption of her soul and to appease God. There were none to make claim upon it, none to whom she wished to leave it, yet she loved her money, and with one of those unaccountable crosses of mood and purpose, in a way resented the idea of the beneficiary. At times it seemed to her sick fancy that the chaplain, the doctors, the nurses, all combined to wait. They would stand about her bed waiting — for the money. And once she was dead none of them would wait — no, not even long enough to say a prayer for the outcast spirit.

She feared the power of neglect they would have over her when death had loosed her grip on the purse strings. So Father Nicolo's word of "liras" sealed the speech upon her lips.

Helen remembered quite clearly the girl she had seen talking to Margaret in Santa Maria, and also the woman she had seen in her husband's studio. She had remarked the resemblance at the time, but not until Father Nicolo told her of the novice being in America did she give any heed to the idea, or imagine it to have value. Now as she pondered the affair in the long silence of her weary days she became convinced of the identity.

Yet she withheld her knowledge from the priest. There was the pride of the woman, the association of wifehood. For, no matter what the outward form of their life, Robert Lane was her husband still. The weight of the fact proved itself in her sensitive reluctance to reveal the circumstances of his liaison. Perhaps a dread too much might come to light, perhaps a regret for the unfairness of the blind choice, perhaps conventional prejudice only held her from the word. Whatever the reason, while the Church hunted vainly, and time sped on to the ultimate fiasco, Helen Lane, the devotee of religion, lay dying with the

clue at her hand, turning the question over and over in her mind.

So week followed week. Father Nicolo had not been to see her for a long time. He wrote from Washington of their final desperate efforts to track Berenice, regretting that necessity kept him absent. Helen herself was sinking fast, and with her decreasing strength the spiritual panic grew. The Church loomed before her darkly avenging. It seemed to requite the years of her devotion coldly, as though her whole service and the bulk of her fortune were not yet enough to atone for her deliberate sin against the law.

Dread haunted her wandering faculties. In a nightmare she saw the accounts made up, and she had not done enough. "More, more, more! You have not given all," the power of the Church cried with outstretched hands, while death pointed the balance against her, and wrung her pride wringing out the last jot and tittle of her possession, the secret which for shame's sake she had hidden. So terribly did this vision afflict her, waking and asleep, that Helen determined to speak, but not to the priest. Instead she would see Robert herself, and gain what knowledge he had of the girl, reserving if need be the prudence of silence. Not

for him nor for the girl this consideration, but for Helen Lane — the wife.

Hard pressed between the torment of fear and pride she sent for Robert.

To the man the park and gardens of the summer palace were blightingly familiar, its reminiscence trenchant. He had dreamed of love among those roses and among them had awakened to the thorns; their sting yet potent goaded him to resentful thoughts, as he bowled smoothly on between the snow dappled lawns. Then he sought to put the harshness aside. He wanted to go to Helen kindly, with unprejudiced mind, and the irritation of former things kept constantly nagging at his mood.

At best it was a mournful day; one of those uncertain phases of a January thaw which helplessly divides the mind between the need of overcoat and waterproof. Lane, shivering in the discomfort of the latter as he drove through the now settling cold, thought he had never known the landscape more dejected and unfriendly. The far hills patched themselves with drifted snow as though to hide the faded glories of their ravished foliage, while ever in and out, viewing the tragedy of their lost splendours, the dour river slid in selfish ease. Black clouds rolled heavily

across the mournful scene; and the adjacent trees, all up and down the avenue, stirred weakly in a feeble wind with brittle, rasping tremor, unable yet to rouse themselves and shake aside the newly fallen sleet.

The surroundings of the place laid out for sunshine, and inviting depths of shade, now turned inhospitably to gloom and chill repulsion. Even the house, with its wide verandas and many windows along the Hudson front, seemed resentfully to mock the intrusion of arrival. Robert saw it all in contrast to those marvellous spring days when Helen, in the first blossom of her youth, had gloried in and glorified the whole. And it was grand, extravagant, overpowering, and in its morbid mood still admirable. He stopped to look at his favorite view, thinking, "For this a father bartered his son's fate, chaining him hideously through all time." For his father must have known Helen, he reasoned,— his father who had known men in an uncanny way.

Robert thought too of the woman who had been so favored, so beautiful, so much the idol of the gods of this world — now dying. Yet he was not prepared by all his thinking for the change in her. A single glance at his wife swept aside all feeling but pity.

"It is terrible, terrible, terrible!" his mind kept on reiterating as he crossed from the door to the bed, and at the moment thought could do no more. The face gazing up to him retained Helen's wonderful regularity of feature, and, now he was nearer, he could see the eyes were still coldly unemotional.

"Helen!" Lane breathed, trying not to show the horror he felt. She made no reply, and he was not sure that she heard him till one of the wraith-like hands raised itself in feeble demonstration, seeking, he thought, to clasp his, and wandering pitiably from the simple, child-learned convention. Lane reached to take it, filled with emotion over this weak advance toward reconciliation, but the ghost-like thing fluttered and eluded his grasp. She had signalled the nurse on duty to leave the room.

The watchful sister, in her ungainly starched headdress, went out and left them alone, man and wife, after ten years.

Robert broke the silence with gentle deliberate speech.

"It grieves me to see you here, Helen. Let me tell you — will you believe how much it grieves me? I had no idea —"

With the direction of her eyes, now shining out

of the hollow face like two great lights on a rocky coast, she invited him to take a chair beside the bed.

Lane sat then and waited; evidently she realized the limit of her strength and harboured her speech for some definite purpose. Seeing her lips move he bent forward to catch the murmur.

"I want you to tell me about that person in the studio — all you know."

He thought her mind wandered, that it had turned back to the days of their separation when the building of the studio had been a new and absorbing interest. She had never been in it, he remembered with a pang, although when started the place had not been intended for solitude. His wife had never cared to enter into any of his concerns. Did she regret the slight and seek to make atonement now in the pathetic vagueness of enfeebled health? Though at a loss to unravel the meaning of her words, the trend of them was so apparent that Lane was deeply touched. She wandered, surely, but the poor brain turned now to his affairs, and the man's heart was very tender as he listened.

"They want to find her. They must soon — or it will be too late. You know about it — tell me."

"Who want her? Who is it they want? You must try to explain and I will help you." He spoke patiently, clearly, as one speaks to reach the understanding of a child, thinking to humor her was best.

"I went there — after you left for Paris. There was a girl in the place — with red hair — and — she was — enceinte."

The words came one by one brokenly, from the shortness of her breath, and her reluctance to speak them, but the elegant French expression struck Robert like a blow. He cowered under the instantly illuminating knowledge as under a flash of lightning. It seared him, and he could hear the thing crashing in his brain. Helen in the studio! Helen against Berenice — great God! What had the one said — what had the other suffered? — And he had doubted her love, reproached her! Robert's imagination filled in at once the details of that interview, but he must know, he must hear the truth.

"Tell me," he urged in turn, the deliberation of his manner giving way to anxiety. "What happened? What did you say to her?"

Helen moved her head and the old hauteur expressed itself even from the pillow. Such

intensity seemed uncalled for, his interest insulting to her.

"Nothing.— What could I have to say to the hussy?" The last word went keenly sibilant into the calm room.

Robert sprang to his feet. Had it been otherwise he could have struck the speaker. He longed to strike, to launch the physical violence in him against the insult — against anything.

There was no question of guarding her dignity from the world now, they were alone, and the outraged woman spoke. All the venom of the supplanted wife rang in the word. Her righteous indignation against the unfaithfulness of the man — and he so old too! That had struck her about him as he entered the room. He was changed also, old and stooped and careworn; for him no excuse of wild oats and youthful folly to mitigate the sin. Helen forgot the man in his prime and judged Robert as she saw him, aged.

He struggled for self control, increasing his strangeness by terrible facial contortions. His hands drew into livid knots and his breath came audibly in his throat. When he could speak he questioned her again, for it was he, now, who sought information.

"You must have said something! — What — what did you say?"

"I told her I was — your wife — that was all."

Enough surely! The very worst! Conflicting emotions rolled over him as he followed one after another the phases of the revelation. The injustice of his thought of Berenice during the last weeks, the cold righteousness that must have been Helen's; the awfulness of the disclosure; and above all the folly, the iniquitous folly of not having told it himself. She would never come back to him — never — never — thinking he had meant to deceive her. He knew the girl's pride, felt her pain, and at last understood her silence.

Despair, hatred, self-condemnation, ran each its course and was reflected in Lane's face, and as he stood by the bed with his large head and heavy shoulders looming over her, he seemed to Helen another sort of avenger. She put up a feeble hand to ward him off, and then, as she saw him turn to go, plucked at his coat suddenly, struggling to raise herself in bed.

"Tell me, tell me!" she gasped in effort. "Where is the creature? — We must know — I must know — I must tell the priest."

Robert hesitated a moment, facing her again.

He seemed even older than when he had entered the room.

"I don't know where she is, and it is your doing. You sent her away. The child is dead and she — gone." And after a pause, "You have done me great wrong Helen, you have murdered my children." His voice broke in pain.

Each word, the spoken accusation of the dread sin which tormented her soul, fell like a dead weight on the scared heart of the listener. Then she had lost this too, had put it away with her own hand, the balance would not be for her.— So much of children! Such a maelstrom! Her nature cried out against it; and all at once she knew how much it had sacrificed her pride to send for Lane; how much she had desired this information. Beaten, she sank back upon her pillows, a transitory excitement in her eyes giving place to cold resentment.

The old expression aroused all Robert's animosity.

"And if I knew I'd keep it from you." The words sprang to his lips unbidden as he turned on his heel, and quick as a flash the woman's antagonism roused to meet his. Man might be as unforgiving as Nature or God, but of the three avengers she had nothing to fear from Lane, and

she was indignant that he had failed her in this crisis. The drastic effort of her wrath sent her voice stridently resonant after him through the silence.

"You were always a selfish man."

He caught the words at the door and paused. Helen's last word! It was so like their old dissensions. The irony of it all amazed him. After ten years — reunion — for this! And the woman dying! The thought struck no answering chord of pity now, only it checked him. Lane went out silently and closed the door.

XIV

THE BUSINESS OF LIFE

I

All this time Berenice, unconscious of the sensation she had created in detective circles, as of the trouble and anxiety and heart burnings on her account, was quietly established in a flat on the west side, inconspicuous in the tide of decent middle-class life, where a girl with red hair more or less occasioned no remark.

When, on that hot afternoon, she had turned into Broadway full of the courage of enterprise, she had noticed a woman ahead, walking quickly, a gaudy yet well remembered figure. The plainly clad ex-shop girl hastened to overtake this dashing edition of feminine charms with a heart bounding to outrun her feet in tumultuous joy, for here was a friend indeed, one whom she could trust. In the excitement of recognition, Berenice forgot the association with past things, but it would have made no difference had she thought

of it. She rushed pell mell through the midday crowd, and at last breathless gave up the chase and called aloud.

"Gabrielle! Gabrielle March!"

The other turned, instantly alert, to gaze at the pursuer in puzzled curiosity. But as the figure drew nearer a broad smile chased question from her face.

"My stars! If it isn't the angel! What ever are you doing here, alone too, and in those clothes?"

"I was afraid you wouldn't know me, Gabrielle," Berenice puffed, fanning herself and perspiring from her sudden effort. Yet while she begged the question she longed to talk with this friend of her own sex.

"I didn't at first," came the prompt, direct answer. "You look a ghost! Been ill, or going to be?—What did you have for lunch?" Gabrielle drove the last question in suddenly as one who finds the joint in the harness. And she knew well where to look for it. Long experience of working life had taught her the inevitable, unwise beginning of a poor woman's extra economy.

Berenice was obliged to confess, protesting "I had a good breakfast."

"Yes. You have coffee every day in the studio. I used to smell it — Ah!" The lip movement, expressive of a gourmand's joy, invited a smile.

"I'm not there now."

Gabrielle whistled. "So that's the go! Had a row, eh? — Well, where are you then?"

"I'm no place." The sound of it was so forlorn, the wording made the fact so hideous, Berenice could not keep a touch of pathos out of her voice, nor a tremble out of her brave laugh. Yet till that moment she had not herself felt so badly.

"Poor kid! Up against it, eh? — Now you pile right onto this surface car with me and come up to the flat. We can rustle round for something to eat, and — well, we can't talk here."

She hailed the car while speaking, and presently Berenice found herself ushered into the long hall of a typical city flat built to rent cheaply. At the far end of a dark passage lay a parlor and a dining room with curtained arch between, and back along its length, as she was afterwards to know, stretched a continuance of kitchen, bath and bedroom, all lighted from the narrow court. This particular flat, being at the top of the particular rabbit-warren, contrived to seize rather more than the common share of light and ventilation. And to Berenice, after the mixed depres-

sion of Mrs. Mede's establishment, it looked a veritable little heaven. She gazed about lost in admiration, cheered by the gaily coloured posters decking the walls, and soothed by the simple mission furniture.

"Is this really yours, Gabrielle? Fancy having a little flat all to oneself! I wish I had!"

"Law, chit! I haven't got the place to myself! You must think I'm a blooming millionaire! — There are five of us." Gabrielle disappeared into the miniature kitchen, from which proceeded immediately a sound of running water and a mild explosion of gas, but her voice continued firmly throughout this performance, triumphing over accidental noises. "That is to say there ought to be five of us, but there are only four now since Penelope got married. We want a fifth; we must have a fifth for expenses." Suddenly the speaker whirled out of the door and dropped both hands on the shoulders of her visitor. "Why shouldn't you stay?"

Berenice, taken aback by the speed and violence of the other's impulse, gaped at her a minute, and the idea finally penetrating her mind cried with shining eyes. "I'd love to — but — "

"But me no buts — it's settled! Shed your hat and come and cut the bread. Everybody

lends a hand here, you'll see — 'Everybody works but father', and as there isn't any father that makes little odds."

Berenice ate heartily of good bread and butter and boiled eggs. And she pushed her chair back with a happy sigh, for she had enjoyed the little meal more than any since she ate with Robert in the studio. The sympathetic surroundings of the tiny room acted with her newly awakened vitality to produce hunger and the comfort of hunger satisfied.

She looked wistfully at Gabrielle. "You know I can't stay really because I haven't any money — but I would love to. It must cost a lot to live here!"

When Gabrielle told her the amount of the fifth share she gasped. "Why, I paid more than that at Mrs. Mede's!"

"So you would — I know! Boarding's no way to live! This comes to a question of one's ability to get on with other people. We are crowded here when we're all in, but look what we get — peace and comfort and our own things, and a decent corner in which to see a soul if we want to. It's give and take among us five and a need to keep our tempers, but I for one think the result worth while."

"You are wonderful, Gabrielle. I could never have thought of it."

"I didn't invent bachelor flats, child, nor the great idea of community."

"But I cannot stay because I have no money — not any. I've lost my place."

"Lost your job! That's bad! — What was it?"

"Hats. Trimming — I had just begun."

The woman looked at Berenice quizzically and burst into laughter. "Do you remember the one I bought for you? What a little spitfire you were!" She was alarmed to see her guest go white as death.

"Oh, don't!" Berenice threw herself down and buried her face in Gabrielle's lap. The chorus girl felt no compunction about seeking confidences.

"What is it all, Angel? — What was the row? Aren't you going back to the old square?"

And Berenice at last unburdened her heart, pouring out the whole story to the uncritical, sympathetic confidante.

"I would never have thought it of *him*," was all her comment, adding from the depths of stage experience. "You can never tell how it is with a man." Awed for a time by the sight of a grief too deep for tears Gabrielle sat quite still. But

presently she laid her hand gently on the red head in her lap. "Better stay with us, little Angel, you ain't fit to be alone." Then, as though ashamed of the momentary tenderness, she spoke with the brusqueness of her usual manner.

"If we all buck up we can find you something to do. Leave it to me, chit. Let us go first and get your things, and pay for that room."

Berenice sat back on her heels gazing into the strong, beautiful face above her. "Gabrielle, you are good. Do you think the others won't mind having me here — now?"

"Mind! — Not they! Why should they mind? It's not your fault — the man was a cheat. And besides we aren't going to tell them. Straight, I'll keep mum. You'll be one of us in no time, and you'll like it here too. We are jolly and comfortable, or will be when the weather lets up. My, but it's hot! I'll stand you one at the fountain as we go out."

Fortified by an ice-cream soda they went together to Mrs. Mede's. It was arranged, however, that Gabrielle should not appear. Berenice did not wish to allow even this possible clue to remain for G. Hammerton Rust.

"There is a man that likes me," she explained. "And I am afraid he's a bad man.— I want to

lose him. Would you mind, Gabrielle, having another soda while I bring the things. You are so well known, and so pretty, I am sure Mrs. Mede would talk about you and then — you see."

The woman acquiesced amused and not displeased. "I'm only one chorus girl among thousands, but if you want it so, all right. I am flattered to think of the sensation I might cause, but will forego the pleasure for your sweet sake."

"I'll bet he likes her!" she said to herself watching Berenice depart.

It was dinner time when they got back to the flat, and Gabrielle's halloo from the door raised a chorus of answering voices.

"Hurry up there!"

"The corn's spoiling!"

"Get a move on, Gaby! Have you bought out the town?"

Berenice hung back a little, shyly observant. Two anxious faces bent over the table on which had just been placed a splendid dome of amber coloured corn, ripe on the cob, and steaming from the kettle, while sounds from the kitchen gave evidence of yet another of the little family. A small boy tore himself from the temptation of the golden food and ran boisterously to Gabrielle, who dodged behind a chair to boo at him. Gurg-

ling with laughter the child caught up his end of the game, and without interrupting the sport the woman called aloud:

"It's the kid — the little Jesus!"

In a moment Berenice was on the floor and the child in her arms.

"I do believe he remembers you. He's strange generally."

"Why ever didn't you tell me?"

"I forgot all about him! — There, come out of it, Ally! He is a limb!" As she spoke Gabrielle ran to the rescue and disentangled the two impish fists which were twining themselves in noisy mirth among the heavy short locks of red hair.

"This is Berenice, girls, the angel in my picture. She's come to stay. And that is Anna Bell, Ally's mother; and Kate, my sister, she's a nurse," and as another figure entered from the side door, — "Miss Hearst."

At the name, Berenice started to her feet, trembling in all the depths of her happily forgotten shame. For a moment she and the tall, stern faced woman eyed each other in silence.

"Glad to see you," said the New Englander, offering her hand, and the girl knew her secret safe.

The others welcomed Berenice as a friend of Gabrielle's and a co-operator, and in a very short time she was as much at home as any member of the little community. They all liked her, for her sweet temper and her gentle ways, and a habit of doing the small things nobody else wanted to do. Some of these really afforded pleasure to Berenice. It delighted her to put Ally to bed in the corner devoted to him and his mother, while the latter strummed over operatic airs, though she had not believed the possibility of their accommodation when she first looked into the room.

"Why it's a closet! This must be intended for linen."

The others laughed. "Dear, no!" Gabrielle assured her. "Linen! Why? We haven't more than two sets, one at the wash and the other on the table, and I fancy the people who live in these apartments never have. It's the servant's bed room all right. Off the kitchen, don't you see. Bang up stylish!"

Do we sleep four in a bed, Berenice had wondered, not daring to ask, but her puzzle solved itself when Miss Hearst, before her astonished eyes, dismantled the dining-room couch of cushions and cover, and began to unfold iron extensions cunningly contrived — and lo, a bed! A large com-

modious double bed, restful and inviting! There were many surprises in the ins and outs of such housekeeping, and crowded inconvenience, but withal it was fun, and Berenice loved the change.

They did their best for her in the matter of employment and the girl tramped dusty leagues in the quest, with always the same result. "Why did you leave your last place?" came inevitably in the course of even the most promising interviews. And in answer, Berenice unable to think of a feasible lie, and freshly pained by the remembrance of that trying scene, the derision and shame of it, would murmur unconvincingly of illness. She got no work.

At last Gabrielle, in kind experiment, gave her a costume to make over, offering to pay the regulation price for such fixing, and the girl took up the task eagerly. With a practical suggestion or two from Miss Hearst, and the guidance of her own exquisite taste, supplemented by a tremendous amount of time and trouble, the result turned out more than satisfactory. The garment was a marvel for the cost Gabrielle announced, and indeed she looked well in it, for Berenice had subdued the whole to a setting for the girl's remarkable beauty. All who saw her were delighted, and

the members of the chorus clamoured for the address of her new woman.

Hats followed on costumes, Gabrielle in her generous, large-hearted way advertising her friend right and left, not by appearance only but with loud recommendation and ready effusion till Berenice found herself in great demand. A steady thriving trade grew out of their first venture, passing at all hours up and down the long hall way of the apartment, and soon Berenice had more work than she could do.

One advantage they reaped in general from this new régime. Berenice at home stitching could keep her eye on the flat; and housekeeping, which had been conducted in a hit or miss fashion according to the amount of time anybody had to spare for it, now assumed a form of law and order. And the boy too benefited by her gentle attention and care, for Berenice watched over him amidst her sewing, while his mother, recently stranded by the breaking down of a light opera company, trailed out her endless hours in that same monotonous search for a job.

Berenice sympathized with her more acutely than any of the others.

"It's the same thing," Anna Bell declared, "only in our profession it is worse. You, Bere-

nice, are in the line of useful work, if you get a place and do well they keep you, but with us see how it is — we get started, do our best and all that, and zip! The show goes to the storehouse. Then where are we for the rest of the season? Glad to pick up any old thing to make ends meet. If I was out of the theatrical business, and could do a single other thing, I'd never get into it again, that I know!"

"Yes, you would," said Gabrielle. "You'd be right back with us in no time. There is no use pretending you're a chorus girl, Anna Bell. You're an artist — when you get a chance! And you would die of longing for the old life if you were to cut it out."

"Cheer up!" Berenice added. "You'll find something. Your chance will come — mine did, in the end."

Not long after Anna Bell ran tempestuously down the hall late for dinner and burst upon the assembled inmates with a rush of excited words: "News! Girls, news! My chance at last! Freebody's taking a company on tour — a good one! Graceman told me. It is just decided and the company is not complete, he told me ahead of time so I could get a little practice before applying. I got this on the way up and I'm going to

start at once." She waved the music before them and fell breathless on the sofa, then interrupted the reception of her news by a passionate cry. "If I could only get it — I feel I could sing Nedda! I could! I could!"

"Uncommonly nice of Graceman to let you know. He's A 1."

"I was simply wild to tell you all. I must try it. I must get that part!"

"Come and have some grub first, Anna Bell," advised the practical head of the family, for the excited young woman had already opened piano and music, and pulling off her gloves plunged fiercely into the middle of the opera.

Berenice started, not alone from the crash of a sudden discord which sent shivering through her a message of tingling nerves, but under the strange reawakening power of sound. Robert Lane had been fond of Pagliacci, particularly so. They had heard it more than once in full and practiced it together part by part, she diligent to please him, and he eager to train her beloved voice to correct delivery of his favorite passages. Her heart was flooded with the melody, and now again she heard the familiar air.

Anna Bell made a valiant attempt, but the irresolute hands wavered and soon dropped away,

hopelessly lost among the intricacies of the accompaniment. She flounced off the stool in despair and the velvet of her skirt catching on its upholstered top sent the heavy thing over backwards with a jarring thud.

"Law, Anna Bell! Do come and eat. You're like a cyclone!"

She joined them without further urging, her mercurial spirits ringing a thousand changes from lively hope to lamentation. It was always so, she went among them like an invading army, upsetting, annoying, entertaining, delighting their peaceful atmosphere — and withal they loved her.

That night Berenice would not amuse Ally, though he begged for it; she established him at the table alone with his blocks and herself drifted restlessly to and fro in the rooms, gravitating toward the piano. Though she played well by ear, she had not struck a chord since the studio days; she had not cared to do so, but tonight memory and sense were all alive again. First she replaced the overturned stool, and finally slid half reluctantly into place. Her hands rested a moment above the mute notes as though hesitating to wake the intimate echoes of her dead life, and then, ex-

quisitely sweet, in pure Italian, the aria floated from her lips.

With one accord the girls stopped the clatter of their work, suspended action till the last sound died away. And poor Anna Bell, her hands still deep in the dish water as they had been arrested instantly the first note sounded, felt two tears roll out of her eyes and splash on the surface, now fast tesselating with conglomerate chilled grease.

"Bravo, Berenice! Bravo!" they called. "Why didn't you tell us you could sing?" Both sisters rushed to congratulate the new performer, and Miss Hearst in the kitchen turned to Anna Bell.

"Why don't you get her to give you some pointers?"

But the actress shook her head, frankly shaking more tears into the conveniently receptive pan. "She'd get the part right off, if she tried."

"Lord! Anna Bell! Berenice wouldn't do a mean trick like that on you!"

"I don't mind," she blubbered. "It isn't that — but I think she ought. I should make her do it. She'd go far and it is a lot better than sewing those old costumes.— I haven't really got a chance, and it seems a pity for us both to lose.

That's the way to sing — that's it! And you heard me before supper."

Temperament at its lowest, but they were accustomed to her.

"So this is the woman who day before yesterday wouldn't advise anybody to go into the theatrical profession! Better than costumes, eh? Better than a legitimate business! Buck up!" Gabrielle admonished. "Berenice will put you wise on the Italian, I never thought of it, and you'll take all the cakes in the ring. Hurray! We're winners!" The incorrigible comforter whipped up her skirts and executed a high kick in celebration of the anticipated victory.

Patiently Berenice instructed Anna Bell in the euphonies of the Italian language, also passing on the whole of her musical learning, with generous free enthusiasm till the dread day of competition which sent the little soprano out in the morning trembling like a lamb to the slaughter, and brought her back to the flat radiantly victorious at five o'clock.

"I've got it! I've got it! Berenice — I've got it!" she cried, entering like a storm and impetuously throwing her arms about the other's neck. "I've got Hedda, and it was the Italian won for me. Oh, you darling!" Straightway the artist

gave herself up to a tempest of weeping for temperament was at its height.

"I waited hours," the tale went on, between breaths and sobs, and delicious radiant tears. "And it was getting worse and worse. We could hear his voice through the wall — louder and louder till it seemed it would burst the room. Then suddenly the door opened and Freebody himself stood there, his hair all rumpled over his head and his eyes wild. 'Can any body here sing *Italian?*' he bawled like a mad beast. You could have heard a pin drop. No one dared speak. Then up I got, I don't know why or how, and I walked right in out of my turn and all. He glared at me. 'Begin,' he snapped, 'the aria.'— The aria, Berenice, the aria! Did you ever hear such luck! I took one good grasp of myself as I heard him speak, and I opened my mouth and sang right off quick without time to be afraid.— When I was done it was silent, horrible. I expected him to roar out and he didn't make a cheep. It was just like waiting for a clap of thunder to follow the flash, and we all waited, and waited, and waited. Still it did not come. I was so nervous I could not have sounded a note.— 'You'll do,' he said frowning. 'Take her name, Burton.— She's the

only one of the whole bunch that knows a word of the language, and it's so damned easy!' "

"It is easy," laughed Berenice. "I suppose that is why nobody takes any trouble about it."

"First rehearsal is Thursday morning, and oh, I'm in it!" The mother of the boy capered about him, and hugged him, and crooned her happiness into his neck, and handed the little villain over to his foster mother that she might rush to the door to let the others in and tell her glorious news to fresh ears. And Berenice hugged the child in turn and was very happy that Anna Bell had succeeded. They were all happy that evening, with true, generous, joyous hilarity.

"We must celebrate," they decreed, and choose each item of the feast with the pleasure of those who indulge seldom. And having prepared it themselves sat down to a splendid repast, topped off by an ice cream brick. "Which Hearsty provides out of her own funds," Gabrielle announced.

Hearty good fellowship, and genuine delight filled their cup to overflowing, and a chum or two, having heard of the contract and dropped in to offer congratulations, they kept the evening alive with jest and laughter, till the sound of "She's a jolly good fellow" at twelve-thirty, brought a

shower of protesting knocks from the tenant below, and effectively broke up the party.

II

With the departure of Anna Bell in all the glory of Freebody's touring company, Berenice took over the proprietorship of Ally and the closet, and was rapturously happy in having the child all to herself. The affection he claimed sprang naturally to the bereft heart. She guarded the boy, and played with him, and taught and tended him, making their outings and their moods and pleasures, grow together, as though he were her own, as indeed he seemed to be. Had not the babe lain hour after hour on her heart while Robert painted? Had he not a part in those glorious days? For this lovely child the first yearning motherhood had awakened in the girl's heart; and now, strangely, he was given to console the lonely woman. Many a grim hour of remembrance passed less bitterly for the warmth of his tender form in her arms and the softness of the curly head against her cheek.

Saturday night followed quickly on Saturday night, each with its winding up of the week's work, each with its promise of a day of rest. It was a

busy time always in preparation for that one slack day and Miss Hearst coming in as she did, stamping the snow from her feet, with arms full of parcels for the Sunday provision, grew to be an infallible signal of the week end.

"Here's a boy with something for you, Kate," she called, her hands being too full to take the note.

"Hurrah! It's a case! And just in time, goodness knows. I'm about strapped! Thanks, Hearsty."

"The boy is waiting. What a night! Just look at the snow!"

"Let me brush it off." Berenice advanced on the rubber-enveloped feet, broom in hand. "What awful puddles! We should have done it outside. Quick! The dustpan, Gaby, before it quite melts."

Gabrielle holding the pan admonished Kate. "Hurry and get your things; if it is down town we can go together." And a moment later she was helping the younger sister to change rapidly into nurse's dress and bonnet.

"Now we're ready. Come on! No, one minute!" Gabrielle dashed back for gloves and purse. "Goodnight, girls."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Kate."

"Good-bye, girls," and the door shut with a bang.

"That's a good stroke," Miss Hearst said in her abrupt way. "Kate has been out a long time." She watched Berenice with Ally half undressed in her arms. "He is fretful tonight."

"I don't believe he is well. I meant to ask Kate to look at him.— There, there, Ally, be a good boy now, and Berenice will tell you a beautiful story."

Splendid fact, after Saturday night comes Sunday morning! That wonderful interval of relaxation when each is free to do or not to do the dozen little things crying out to be done, yet crowded from the everlasting intensity of the other six days.

A pleasant aroma of coffee, special indulgence of the holiday, still hung in the little dining room where the girls gathered to enjoy the unaccustomed luxury of time and gossip. Ally slept late, he had been feverish through the night, and a pucker of anxiety was visible in his foster mother's brow when she thought of him. But for the moment her mind was entirely occupied with a refractory collar pattern on the curve of which lurid fragments of the "Journal" supplement

might be seen. The same gaudy sportiveness flashed across the sheets Gabrielle held, burying herself behind their may folds. Miss Hearst sat in the big rocking chair in a streak of cold sunshine, darning stockings.

Generally Gabrielle read bits to them, but this morning she was silent and forbidding, and made no comment on the day's news beyond an indignant snort from time to time.

"What is the matter, Gaby?" but Berenice forgot the question at the sound of the door opening and a step in the hall. "Kate back! The patient must be dead! — What a shame!"

Her voice expressed only a keen disappointment at the thought of their chum's untimely release from duty, and the others smiled at this newly developed, mercenary phase.

Kate came in and set her bag down wearily, saying, "That's finished. And I'm out again."

"We're so sorry!" they cried in ready sympathy. "It is too bad! You deserved a good long case, Kate. Is the man dead?"

"It was a woman," she replied, looking at Berenice. "A woman about your age."

Something in the words brought the scene of death home to them vividly. They were abashed, ashamed of their hardness and levity; and Kate

herself, standing with hands behind her back gazing out of the window, was the first to voice the thought.

"Girls, we are brutes! — I heard you as I came in. And it jarred, somehow, though it is just what I had been thinking all the way home. I feel a beast myself.— To see death and not to care — but for so many miserable dollars out of my pocket! To be able to face the thing without flinching, and to count the cost to myself only. It is hateful! And it is not the hospitals do it, nor the training, it is the work! Life and need!" After a pause she broke out again. "It is all hateful! Earning is not fit for women, the scramble coarsens us,— and we must work! I do not believe there is so much difference in our natures, a sweet woman is a protected woman — that is all. Working makes us hard just like men."

"But men are not hard, they are not like you say — " Berenice asserted eagerly.

Kate turned to her. "What do you know about men, child?" And again, for her curiosity was aroused by the red face now bent over the table.

"What do you know about men, Berenice?"

"I know about them!" Gabrielle cried, suddenly, fiercely, dashing her paper aside. "Damn

them!" She had caught a glimpse of the girl's crimson distress. Miss Hearst had seen it also, and each, not knowing that the other knew, had trembled for the secret. The violence of the explosion of Gabrielle's sentiments, however, effectively cleared the threatening atmosphere.

"There's another dear little chit in the company, done, sacked, deserted. And such a kid, too!" she added by way of explanation.

Kate took up the defence. "Then it is her own fault likely. Girls get what they ask for, I believe.— You're always down on the men, Gaby."

"It isn't the asking I mind, nor the getting, either.— It's the mean trick of desertion. Not playing the game! Running away from one's duty is a vile trick and women don't do it. They are true enough when they are allowed to be true." Fury lit Gabrielle's eyes, indignation rang in her voice, at the moment she was magnificent. This woman, who had been surrounded for more than half the years of her life with sexual intrigues of all kinds, could still burn with contemptuous anger, and kindle the flames of her soul to invective over the thought of a little companion deserted in her extremity. Certainly there was something splendid in Gabrielle.

"I could kill the man!" she cried clenching her hands. "If Hammerton Rust was at my mercy — !"

"Rust!" Berenice started, and Miss Hearst looked up from the heel she was darning.

"It must be Ally's father," Kate said. "That is one of his names. A dapper fellow — with bad eyes."

Berenice sat stupefied. Ally's father! The idea was unbelievable; she gaped over it; and into her mind rushed the thought — "Poor Anna Bell!" For a time, remembering how the man had tormented her with his attentions, she almost hated the child, then asserted her will to put aside the evil inclination, for the boy was not responsible. She marvelled at the strangeness of life; that she should be caring for Rust's child instead of her own — and Robert's. And ashamed of the instant's dislike of the innocent, she began to lavish more affection on him. But something had gone out of her heart, she could no longer feel him as her own. She did not want to own him. It was impossible to disassociate him from the thought of his father, and when the boy grew noisy he was like his father which made it worse and harder.

Gabrielle had begun preparing a second break-

fast for the hungry Kate, who, tired out by the night's vigil, sat in idleness watching Miss Hearst deftly fit the illuminated collar pattern about the neck of Berenice.

"Why don't you two start a shop?" she asked. "You would coin money."

"But would we get it?" Miss Hearst mumbled, her mouth full of pins. "Don't you suppose I have dreamed of a shop and of being my own boss for years. The difficulty is the credit. Who is to guarantee the customers' characters? Who is to pay for clothing the smart women who won't pay for themselves? I can't take risks with six mouths to fill."

"Well, I know I've got to rustle round after work to fill one," Kate said dismally.

But by the end of the week she had not received a call and there was no money coming through that channel.

On the Saturday morning they held a council of war, after Miss Hearst left. They did not think of appealing to her for all knew that Hearsty crushed the last drop of blood out of a penny, while the main part of her salary went to nourish growing boys with country appetites. Hence the plain suits, the plain hats, the unlovely, unredeemed sameness of life, even the plain careworn

face. As it was not considered fair to ask Hearsty for more than her legitimate share the council sat without her.

"That's my limit," said Kate, laying her last ten cent piece on the table. "You'll have to fork out, Gaby."

"There you are then." Gabrielle, the wealthiest among them, laid three quarters and a dollar bill on the table beside the ten cents. "I'm cleaned out."

"Hully Gee! You must have been going a pace Gab! Why didn't you invite your sister to the party?"

Gabrielle looked shamefaced. "You see, Kate, last Saturday night I thought you were fixed all right so I — well who else was there to look after the chit?" The last was thrown out in defence. "The company have chucked her, and her precious, respectable family won't take her in, no fear! — I'll want this for car fare," she finished, picking up one of the twenty-five cent pieces.

Berenice closed her hand over the dollar and sixty cents. "I must just make it go as far as it will, for I have not a cent either — and Ally needs things."

Through all the round of her shopping, Berenice had one dominating thought. "Ally needed

things." Doctors will wait but the druggist demanded cash after the manner of city druggists — and the child was ill. Since her discovery of his parentage, Berenice had grown supersensitive over the boy's welfare, as though her conscience kept hourly watch to hide from herself the ebb of her affection. The sick child needed things — constantly recurring with that thought was the outline of a scheme. A wildly daring solution of the difficulty, common enough to the many yet so new to Berenice she needed all her courage to carry it out.

Deliberately she turned from the last shop on her list and hurried down the long avenue. From afar she could see the three golden balls shining through the mist of the January thaw, and knew that inside the mysterious door lived a man who lent money "on" things. She had the thing ready in her purse, the one charm and talisman from which she had sworn never to part. The ring was gold and she thought it would be worth a large amount, yet she stood some distance away in hesitation, reluctant to enter that low browed door. The girl did not want to part with the relic, but when she had slipped it from her rosary, the long untouched beads calling vividly on memory evoked a ghost of old religious belief. She looked

on the ring as sacred, dedicated to the service of children, and conscience would not allow her to refuse its use for the benefit of Ally Rust. Berenice shrank from the name.

Gazing at the sign of the pawnbroker, the foster mother remembered the little fellow's delight in passing the gilded balls, how he reached desiring to grasp the charm, and puckered his brows as though seriously to determine their decorative value against the red and white gaudiness of the barber pole next door. She remembered too the flushed, fever tossed child who needed things, and calling herself a selfish goose, straightway plunged into the shop.

Several men were in the ill-ventilated place awaiting their turn while a chalky faced customer pleaded with the man behind the counter for an extra fifty cents allowance on a box of instruments. "Ah, you go on now, give me a dollar and a half! You've had these here in four or five times yet, and you've given me two dollars.— And I need the money today!"

"I can't give you more than a dollar this morning." With that ultimatum the hard mouth shut tight. The broker shook the instruments into place, and stuck the pasteboard cover on at an angle over their strange projections; for the frac-

tion of a second his hand hesitated. A whining protest fell on deaf ears. He looked at the owner. "All right," came the mumbled assent, and immediately the box was flung jangling onto a shelf behind.

"A dollar on a box of dentals," the Jew called loudly to a young clerk, and turned to Berenice. But the girl hung back while an old man with a ragged beard laid down a dirty, abused ticket. "My watch," he said briefly. "It was stopped. And three little rings," placing another ticket by the first. "Three little rings," he said again with a peculiarly gentle intonation.

"Were they stopped?" asked the man.

"No, I put them in later — Ye see, I lost the other ticket."

Carefully, with blunt, broken nailed fingers, the old man counted out the fifteen dollars and seven cents claimed on these four heirlooms. There was a paper to be made out and the customer was slow in speech and action with the provoking deliberation of age. He was the last save herself in the dingy shop, and Berenice trembled for fear some other might come in, feeling she could never speak before a listener. She grew very nervous. At last the broker returned the articles without remark, and while he was pinning the scrubby

ticket to a document, the old man shuffled out. It was her turn.

Shyly, with a furtive sensation of doing something mean, the girl pushed her only treasure across the square of exposed counter, glad to think there was no one else in the place but herself and the dark faced man holding the ring up to the light, and the clerk with whom he consulted. Then the knowledge of her solitary position alarmed her and she took another look at them for assurance. They were in no way menacing.

The swarthy creature turned, and caught her looking and startled her with his harsh voice. "What do you want on this?"

She did not reply, utterly ignorant of the business, and afraid of naming too high a figure, she let silence speak for her, hoping he would mention a sum. But he only waited, examining the ring.

"Would you kindly tell me what I can get? I want to know."

"If you want to pledge, Miss, I'll tell you; otherwise I can't."

"I — I want to pledge," Berenice assented, not quite understanding to what she agreed.

"Two dollars and seventy-five cents."

"But it's gold!" she gasped.

"It's a semi-precious, cut," he replied, chew-

ing without interruption. Already the big, dirty hand offered her the ring back.

"Wait!" cried the girl — Ally needed things, and besides, when Clarice paid she could get it again, or when Anna Bell sent some more money for the boy. "I can redeem it?" she asked timidly to make certain.

"Sure if you come inside a year." He spat expressively on to the floor behind the counter, and waited, disdainful of her ignorance and hesitation.

"I'll it." The voice was faint.

"Name — where do you live?"

"Must you have it?"

"That's the law, Miss." He bent far over the counter to hear a murmured answer, but she gave her address frankly, ready to own to all she did, not so much ashamed now, glad the ordeal was over, and anxious to get back to the sick child.

XV

PASTORALE

"I do wish Kate would come! Why did she choose just this night to go out with Gaby?" Berenice sighed, laying her hand on the child's burning face. Anxiety made her tone almost fretful. After a tiresome day, Ally had grown alarmingly feverish, and the two women, with great hearts but no experience for the emergency, felt strangely inadequate as they waited.

"I calculate he isn't as bad as he looks," the older woman said cheerily but without assurance. "Children are like that, all up in the evening and running about next day same as ever."

"But I don't like it and his mother away. It looks as though we had not been taking care of him."

No need for conscience to assert itself now. The child lay so helpless affection was all his, won by the pity of him, and the beauty of the flushed, pained, rumpled little person. And Berenice could do nothing but sit by the couch, cover-

ing the hot limbs each time he cast the blanket off, smoothing and turning him on the cool pillows, while for sympathy with the nurse rather than with the boy, Miss Hearst gave up her evening and joined the watch. She turned the lights down that he might rest better, and sat with folded hands, marvelling at the other's tireless, gentle attention.

"You take a sight more trouble over him than Anna Bell ever did. She knows nothing about children," the comforter said, soothing the girl's self accusation, and after a moment burst out vehemently, though in a low voice, "That's it! That is always the way! They will marry and have them whether they can take care of them or not! My sister did it. Six she had — six in eight years. Wore herself out over it, and died and left them. Five boys and a girl she left — to me."

"And you took them all!"

"What else could I do? They can't be let starve."

Berenice in her turn marvelled. She had never before seen the stern New Englander in a communicative mood. It thrilled her in a sort of alarm. She wondered if Hearsty were sick also, there must be something wrong. She wanted to

reach out and lay a hand against the low brow from which the widow's peak rose with a splendid curve that could not be mistaken even in the half-light. That speech surely had not come from the impersonal, lip-locked, automaton which lived and moved among them as Sarah Hearst. They knew vaguely she supported nephews, and that was all they knew; how many, or where, or for how long, they might have asked, but did not, and Miss Hearst never volunteered any information. She never spoke of herself or her past, her desires or stake in existence. Though a part of the system and the intimacy of flat life, had not Berenice first met her in the work-rooms of Cross and Spader, she would still have been ignorant concerning the particular form of daily strife which sent the straight-backed woman home every night very late, and very tired, but well paid.

Now she was actually speaking of her own volition about those mysterious hungry boys who devoured every cent out of her shabby purse. By instinct Berenice kept quiet, not knowing that in a certain form of listening is the potent influence to draw forth the secrets of the heart, nor guessing she herself possessed in such degree this subtle compassion that many souls, throwing wide the dustiness of their locked chambers, would

empty their truth into her silence. To the most reticent comes the moment, the desire, the need to speak, and, under the influence of that humanizing weakness which calls for sympathy and prompts to confidence, the self-reliant spinster opened her heart.

"'Sarah Hearst', my sister said before she died, 'take care of my babies. You're strong — and he's weak.' That was the only word she ever said against him. She knew it all along, and we knew that she knew it, but it was never told.— Eliza was as true as they're made. That was the only time she spoke in all those eight years of hardship — and it was true. Tom was no good! He was nice and kind, but he was just that weak! People liked him and they could do anything with him; the last opinion always carried Tom. He hadn't any convictions nor any backbone, and he couldn't be trusted with the children." She spoke vehemently. "A man like that oughtn't to have children! — And they always do."

"Where is he — Tom?"

"I don't know — went off somewhere. He may be dead. But that sort don't die, they take life too easy. I couldn't keep him too, and so he picked up and left. We all liked Tom, but we knew him for a waster, and we weren't sorry

to see the last of him after Eliza died." Presently she continued: "I suppose that sounds heartless, but it's fact. Eliza loved Tom. She wouldn't rest till she'd married him — and never had a chance to rest afterwards, poor girl.— But I calculate I'd have done the same myself." The speaker's voice grew soft, awkwardly so in self-consciousness. "You wouldn't guess I'd ever been in love, would you?"

Berenice had never once associated that stern person with affection, and certainly not with romantic passion, yet she would not have owned it for the world. The colloquial, surprising sentence made the girl feel all at once ashamed of her little understanding. Why should not Miss Hearst have been in love? Realizing it was not so much the import of the words as the confession being made at all that moved her, she replied simply: "Why not you?"

The older woman shook her head. "I suppose it is in us every one — latent, while we're young. Women naturally love, but it is strange to think I have been loved. I sometimes wonder at it when I look in the glass. I always had a plain face, but I wasn't so thin then, and — he used to say I walked like Juno."

She covered her embarrassment and satisfac-

tion with a laugh, as though to make light of the compliment, yet it was apparent she had lived on it for years. Berenice felt two tears rolling down her cheeks in the darkness, and she slipped her hand into the lean hard palm across the surface of which the heavy shears had worn calloused scars.

"Tell me about it."

"There's not much to tell," the other evaded, shirking the question. Even so much asking was enough to break the thin thread of reminiscence, to slam shut the opening heart, and turn the stoical masque once again to an uninterested world. But the voice which questioned had been deliciously full of feeling, and so sweetly coaxing that the jar lasted only a minute. Then with a deliberate putting aside of the present, Miss Hearst continued, for she wanted to speak; of all things, at that hour, she wanted to talk about her love.

"There really isn't much to tell. He was a writer chap that came to our parts. A little fellow with hair like yours; that's why —" she stopped abruptly, dismayed, the selfishness of introspection having almost betrayed her into a reference to the scene of her companion's derision and shame. But Berenice quietly finished the sentence.

"That is why you were so kind to me at Cross and Spader's — I was grateful to you, Hearsty, — Did he write books?"

"No, stories. He meant to write books later on, and he read them all the time; in the fields, in the road, in the house, in bed, even at the table he read; and he would read aloud to me whenever I could take time to listen. He wasn't like the men about there — great strong bulls! He wasn't strong at all and took a deal of looking after.

"He liked best to read poetry to me. I didn't understand every bit of it, but some lines I remember — learned them from hearing him read and recite — and they run in my mind while I'm working in the shop and lift me over it all, take me right back home."

The woman sat with folded hands, and a passionate, rapt expression in her eyes, unlike anything Berenice had ever seen, and in the monotonous tone of a dream began to repeat:

"'And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door, till folding be done.
They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo, they have fed

Where the long grasses stifle the water within
the stream's bed;
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as
star follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us,— so blue
and so far!
Then the tune, for which quails on the corn-
land will each leave his mate
To fly after the player.

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers,
their wine-song, when hand
Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friend-
ship, and great hearts expand
And grow one in the sense of this world's life.
—And then

The glad chaunt
of the marriage,— first go the young maid-
ens.'

"I can't remember more," she said, suddenly breaking off. Perhaps it was not all forgetfulness.

"We used to go out through the cow pasture after milking, up over the brow of the hill to watch the sunset. And he would talk like

the poetry, only better, I thought. I could always understand when he talked.— He wanted me to marry him right away. There wasn't much money, he said, but there would be when he had written the books, and for the time we could go and live together in a little house somewhere — a little house on a hill. He had a great notion about hills — liked to be on the top where it is open. He wanted it, wanted me and the little house, and he urged me saying we should always realize on the present, talking as though life were accidental and our only chance to grasp things at once. But I didn't believe it then. I was so happy I did not want any thing to change. I had never been happy before, and I wanted to go up to the sunset with him many, many times still. It was like crowning the day in majesty with purple and gold. I wanted to keep on going up through the pastures arm in arm with him every evening all the rest of time.— Then Eliza died!"

"And then?"

"I couldn't look after them all," the tone was dully sad, "and the children were helpless — six of them, under eight years! I calculate there wouldn't have been room for six in the little house on the hill."

"And you could give it up — the little house?"

"I did give it up. I have done my duty to the children." The woman's face went hard, she was again the Miss Hearst of Cross and Spader's firm, the expert cutter who was well paid. And Berenice perceived those stern lines to be but the imprint of the task master, that New England conscience to which she had sacrificed all. How different the whole expression when her heart spoke, and the glow of those loved sunsets shone reflected from the fine eyes, crowning the personality as the day in glorious beatitude.

"But hadn't you a duty to the man you loved?" the girl asked mildly. "Did he not need you? If you had married first — what about it?"

"Oh, then, I suppose we'd have got along some how. Tom might have looked to the children. But you see we weren't married — and I did my duty," she was dogged for the moment.

"Oh, duty!" cried Berenice, hotly impatient. "Is there no greater thing?"

Thereupon Miss Hearst's steeled composure broke down utterly. "I wish to God we had married first!" she cried, showing herself a soul beggared by heart's need. "Then there would have been nothing to decide. He said what you say

— but I thought I was right." With her face covered by her hands she spoke shortly. "He called duty a scourge — oh, I shall never forget his terrible anger against it, against us — New Englanders — 'Trying to run the universe in our old fashioned way,' he said. That made me angry too, I had been educated to duty; I thought duty; I breathed duty; and I could see duty and nothing else. And I resented his lack of smypathy. He reasoned with me against sacrificing my life to the care of another's brood; called it injustice that the monster of another man's passion should destroy his palace of dreams. And — he went away."

"Did he never come back?"

"I didn't want him to, at first. I was angry and — proud. I thought he might have waited. I had meant he should read to me and walk with me in the evenings just the same, while I glorified myself in self-sacrifice. I did not see then that I was denying him more than myself — I guess I didn't know enough to understand it. He was always one for the present — I found a book some time later called 'The Palace of Dreams.' It was about a little house on a hill, all the things we had planned and said — and everybody free to read it! I couldn't have done that. I cared too

much! — But I never knew if he cared; after that I couldn't make up my mind."

"I expect he did," Berenice said gently. "Men are proud. He wanted to be trusted, to help you.— And they don't like to show their feelings. Perhaps writing the book made it easier for him."

"I wonder sometimes if they have any real feelings to show." It was the New England spinster speaking again, with sarcastic harshness.

Berenice looked up surprised. "I never thought of it, but I suppose they have."

"We all suppose they have. Just because we feel ourselves we think they must be the same; but they don't suffer long, and we go right on regretting till we are dead!" Another pause followed, and she touched the edge of her unreserve again. "He wasn't like a man, not like our sort up north. He would never let me do anything, nor carry anything. He wouldn't let me lift a hand when he was about; and I could have slaved for him!" The heat of her passion died as abruptly as it had flared up, like the last sputter of life in an almost extinct fire. She sat quiet, watching Berenice, who rose and covered the tossing child.

Through Cross and Spader's Miss Hearst knew

the detectives were hunting for the Italian girl, but the taciturn cutter held her peace. "None of my business, I calculate, Berenice knows where to find the man if she wants to find him." Now she wondered about the details of her friend's romance.

"We don't seem to have any luck in our loving — some of us," she ventured, and the girl smiled faintly through the artificial twilight, but made no offer to return the confidence. So the silence of watching fell upon them and the long minutes ticked themselves out impressively one by one on the cheap alarm clock.

XVI

ZIA'S TALISMAN OPERANT

I

Issuing from the doorway of the Babbington, Paul Solomon was hailed by a large, fur-coated, impressive man who happened to be passing in the street. The two shook hands cordially. They were entirely dissimilar yet in features a close resemblance existed. Both had the sleek black hair of the Hebrew, and the unmistakable prominent eyes; the faces were clean shaven, and in each the full lipped mouth under a Semitic nose pronounced their heredity. Both men were dressed well in the easy comfort of wealth, but about Mark Hamsworthy flashed an opulence effectively dwarfing his companion into modesty.

They were prosperous citizens, these two, in the large sense of the word; part of the financial backbone of the land of their adoption; and each respected the other for sound business ability although they had little in common outside of

relationship. Paul Solomon was a bachelor, a collector of rare art, a worshipper at the feet of Euterpe; Hamsworthy instinctively a family man, reigning supreme and happily in his home after the manner of his race. Where Paul had but two commercial interests, following the fluctuations of the market, and solidly content with the holding of real estate, Hamsworthy had a dozen, and was alive unremittingly in acquisitiveness. Paul's fortune waxed steadily, but the bulk of it had come to him ready invested by the shrewdly, far-seeing elder Solomon; while Mark Hamsworthy, single handed against the world, created his wealth. There lay the real difference between the men and on it was founded their mutual admiration. Paul, indulging in the dilettantism of the second generation, the desires and fine appreciations natural and cultivated by the surrounding of luxury from his infancy, said to himself — "I could never have been at the top without a start. I could not have done what he has done," giving the palm to the man of rough triumphant force, who, in his turn, prodigiously admired the superiority of erudition and the power of knowledge, which, having no time to acquire for himself, he lavishly provided for his sons.

This leviathan of finance still held money dear for money's sake, delighting in the accumulation of the pile; and as it grew he enlarged but never deserted the several sources of his fortune. His clothing store now flourished on Fifth Avenue, and his agents no longer counted tickets after the close of the first act at Yiddish theaters, for Hamsworthy of the East side had become the great Hamsworthy of the theatrical trust. An all-round man of enormous vitality, he drove his money-makers six in hand, or eight or ten, and among other sources of good percentage which he saw no occasion to cut off was a string of little shops winding throughout the city, feeding on poverty, Christian and Oriental, Slavonic and Latin, indiscriminately international in greed. These little pockets of increase had to be left to local managers; but once in a long time it chanced Hamsworthy would make a round of part of the wide flung loop, and from such an inspection he had just returned.

"You are the very man I was thinking of," he said, shaking Paul's hand warmly. "I've been round a few of the shops, and Joseph has some things down there on Eighth Avenue you should see."

"What sort? Old stuff? Good?"

"Intaglios. Look pretty good to me, but of course I don't know the value."

Paul laughed. "You are too modest, Mark. I suppose Joseph advanced about a quarter weight of the settings to be on the safe side!"

The other took his badinage cheerfully. "They aren't set. You go round some day soon, for they will be redeemed. It is the kind of fool thing a man sets his heart on, parts with reluctantly, and rushes to claim at the first chance."

Paul was unconvinced. "There is a lot of poor imitation floating around," he said skeptically.

"Well, you go and see them," Hamsworthy urged.

"I'm free. Let us have a look now. Eighth did you say?"

"Right you are! I have a quarter of an hour — Eighth, yes."

Paul's car was at hand, and in less than five minutes the two were entering the door Berenice had opened so timidly a few days earlier. The swarthy Joseph came to meet them, wondering why the boss had returned, and jumped to open the safe with its rows upon rows of mysterious, well filled drawers.

"Here you are! A fair showing, eh?" The

proprietor cried, spreading the intaglios before Paul.

"Hm — yes," he admitted with the grudging praise of a connoisseur, after separately examining the stones. "It is a find. Hand me that glass, boy.— The poor devil who let these go must have felt it, if he knew."

"How much did you give on them, Joseph?" Both laughed at the amount, but Paul shook his head with a grave face repeating, "Poor devil."

"Looks like a part of a collection, to me, and if so we'll get the rest in time," the pawnbroker advised.

"He might recover it.— There are certainly some here I would like to own."

Joseph shrugged. "They don't recover. I know the man, he's been leaving these things here, off and on, for years."

"Get the book and look up his address," Hamsworthy commanded. "And let me know when the stones are redeemed. You might get a private sale, Solomon, but if they run out you'll have to buy from me, and I'll hold you up!" He was as satisfied as a boy who has bettered his chum in trading knives. "Got anything else in this line, Joseph?" The large white finger ran rapidly down the page of the heavy ledger. "Here,

what's this? Ring, cut stone. Let us see it — 87350."

Paul continued admiring the gems; already his fingers itched to add one or two of them to the shining rows before his own windows. Presently Hamsworthy held the trinket from 87350 toward him.

"There's another cut stone — not so bad either."

The ring Berenice had pawned caught Paul's eyes, and held him in astonishment. "Let me see that!" he cried, hastily shoving the other intaglios aside. The expert examined it carefully, then turning to his friend continued, "If I am not very much mistaken this ring is one I gave Zia — a head of Augustus that may have been cut by Dioscurides. You are getting to be a judge of stones, Hamsworthy.— 'Not bad' indeed!"

The other man was completely taken aback. It was the first time since the general family falling out years before that Paul Solomon had mentioned the younger brother in his hearing.

"Zia — wouldn't be pawning a ring," he stammered.

"The young scamp! Who knows! He swore he'd never part with it. I cannot imagine what made me give him the treasure, but — he took a

fancy to it as a talisman. Do you remember anything about this transaction, Joseph?"

"It was pledged by a red-headed girl. She wanted the money bad, and had to be sure about getting the ring back — first time in a shop, I guess. She only came in —" he consulted the book — "last Saturday."

"Afraid of losing the ring, eh? — Might be a love token; that would be Zia — Where is he now Paul?"

"I don't know, and I have been wondering a good deal about it lately. He has been away three years or more — a long time even for Zia, — and I have some money belonging to him untouched, that makes me think seriously. I believe I will look the girl up and see if she knows anything about him — I'll hunt her up now."

He handed the ring back to Joseph, and took a copy of the address. Then they turned to go. "Where can I leave you, Mark?"

"Oh! I'll not trouble you, thanks. I can cut over here to Broadway and pick up a taxi." The big man opened the door again, calling back. "Let me know if those intaglios are redeemed."

A few minutes later Paul Solomon found himself sitting in a fourteen by fourteen parlor of a cheap apartment house, amid the gaudy disorder

of tinsel and muslin and semi-finished ballet costumes, while a girl who could not yet speak fluent English, told him in scholarly French, all she knew about his brother Zia.

Strange tale of a forsaken beach; a still body, a lonely child who knew no fear of death but yearned toward the dark haired, white faced, motionless form on the sand in the kinship of youth; of a funeral service under the open sky where the flames of two candles lighted two figures only, and the sound of the last mass rose from a girl's throat.

Paul was awed by the story and touched. In spite of his brother's propensity for evil he had loved him; and her voice conjured vividly before his mind the weird, unearthly, inconsistent scene. The body of the lawless Jew, old in experience and deep-dyed in excess of sin, abandoned to the mercy of a violent sea, perishing alone; and the holy child of seclusion, ignorant and pure, kneeling there in the simplicity of faith to chant a requiem — wildly incongruous but who shall say ineffectual in prayer. Thus he pictured her alone with Zia — at least she had no need to fear him dead. Paul's thoughts were mixed bitterly, and very sad.

Like so many of his race who have fallen away

from worship at the synagogue, Solomon was a free thinker, a man without religion, yet for the moment he desired reason to justify the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, to find a healing virtue for the depraved soul in the cadence of that sacred song. The artistic beauty of the incident, no less than its chaste delicacy and its pathos, moved him. And the teller of the tale, with the mouth of a child and the deep eyes of a woman, this little city seamstress, who spoke the French of old manuscripts, this delightful lady clearing away without a trace of false embarrassment the tawdry tinsel of the footlights to make room for him to sit, and sitting herself in gracious dignity befitting a peeress, while she drew for him simply, in the language of one who revisits the scene, this exquisite idyl of death, laid hold on Paul's interest and kindled his imagination.

"She is wonderful," he kept on repeating to himself. "Wonderful, delicious." And to so perfect an understanding and appreciation Berenice soon found herself giving more than a mere outline of the service on the beach. For the first time she put into words that old, enraptured, enthusiastic idea. She told of the little nun breaking prison, consecrating the act with prayer, of

her passion for service, her overpowering pity for the children of the world, the inspiration of her pilgrimage, and how she had pictured the emissary returned, standing in the cloister court with the surrounding band. In glowing language the girl described her dream and the awakening, the longing for life, the vision of the world and the bitter reality — America, the material city. Of many of the secrets which had lain hidden in her inmost heart she talked to Paul during his first visit, while the patron of arts and letters listened spellbound.

Long after the early darkness of the season closed in, Mr. Solomon rose to go.

"You will allow me to redeem that pledge for you, Miss Berenice."

He smiled as he took her hand, and laughed when he saw the two dollars and seventy-five cents marked against the Greek jewel. Certainly Joseph knew his business!

Berenice flew back to her work, stitching against lost time, with a new light in her eyes. Conversation with this man seemed to have lifted her out of the present and its arduous uniformity, back to the golden hours of companionship in the studio; to have buried the noise and needs of the day fathoms deep, replacing them with the old

system of beautiful harmonies. Looking about she wondered if it could really be the same room, the same life, of yesterday. Until that afternoon she had not realized how great had been her loss, how much she had missed thought and study and the kindling touch of mind. In the deprivation the girl had felt the ruin of her love, for such delight had been associated entirely with Robert. But now she saw these things apart, still gloriously open to her, and was reassured by the possibility of a fuller life. The stranger was a man of Lane's world, but easier to talk with than he had been. Mr. Solomon spoke simply, and answered with such patient deliberation she felt sure that he must be able to explain all things, and that he would try to do so if only she had the courage to question; thus she determined to ask him many things for he would come once more at least, to return the ring. The expectation blossomed into an oasis, where tall palms rose to beckon hope through the desert of tomorrows.

A voice of good natured raillery recalled her from such fancies to immediate intrusive life.

"Pass the butter, chit! What are you dreaming about over there, for all the world as if you were in love?"

"Maybe she is," laughed Kate. "She's had a

beau here for hours this afternoon. He came before I took Ally out, and they were sitting together in the dark when we returned. Then he got away before I had a look at him."

In spite of herself Berenice flushed at the attack. Not that her thought of the visitor had any romantic touch; instead Kate's little joke was a desecration of something finely impersonal about her new friendship. The familiarity struck her as hopelessly vulgar, and keyed as she was to more delicate sensibility, it jarred in discord. She protested.

"Not a beau, Kate! He came on — on business; at least to — find out something."

Gabrielle threw back her head for one of her boisterous laughs. "An insurance agent — I'll bet!"

"Well any way it took the Johnny nearly two hours to find out!"

"Must have been a good risk! What did you insure for Berenice, or is he coming again?"

"Yes, he is," said the girl, now almost in tears, "He is coming again, and he is very nice."

"Law, I believe the child is mashed on the man!"

"And mashed him too, coming again! It looks

serious! Order your bouquets girls.— What is his distinguished name?" Kate demanded.

"He left a card, on the little table, and he isn't an insurance agent. He came to see about the pawnshop business, and he took the ticket and will get the ring for me, so I don't have to go there again."

"Probably he's gone off with the ring by now!" Gabrielle had bounced to reach the card, and with the pasteboard in her hand stood amazed. "What did he look like, Berenice?"

She hardly knew how to describe her visitor. "He wore a fur coat," she ventured. "And he was small — I — think he was a Jew."

"Hully Gee! It must have been him!"

"Of course," said Berenice, not in the least understanding, but certain the stranger was whatever he claimed to be.

"Do you mean to tell me Paul Solomon's been here, right in this flat for two solid hours — and it's not even been remarked on! Why, we ought to have lanterns hung out of the windows! — Where did he sit?"

"That's the name," cried Berenice. "Do you know him, Gaby? Who is it?"

"Just about the richest man in New York City — that's all!" And Gabrielle sat down non-

plussed by the magnitude of the honour done them.

"What ever did he want, Berenice? I'd have been scared to death."

"No you wouldn't Kate, he was just like anybody else — only nicer. I had no idea he was a great man. He wanted to know about something that happened before I left Italy, and he was so kind and polite, he even said he was in my debt."

"Paul Solomon in her debt! — Listen to the Queen of Sheba! Chit, if you only play your cards right, you're made. There isn't anything he couldn't do for you. Why, there isn't a woman in the theatrical profession but would jump at him for her angel — though I've heard he's not that sort."

"Oh, Gabrielle, I haven't any cards to play. It is all over now."

"I thought you said he was coming back. I just wish I had your chances!" A plethora of magnificent parts swam before Gabrielle's dazzled vision. She couldn't get away from the romance of it, the wonder — Paul Solomon actually sitting in the old armchair opposite the window, talking to Berenice, making her talk, putting himself in her debt.— The luck of some girls!

When Berenice thought it all over her heart sank. If her new friend was really so great and

rich perhaps he would never come again. Rich men have no time, and he could send the ring. It had seemed to her quite natural to talk with him, but now Gabrielle made so much of it the whole thing grew unreal and impossible. The more they argued about the call — and it seemed they could talk of nothing else — the more certain she became that he would not return, that she would never see Mr. Solomon again, never have the opportunity of asking him about things.

II

Mr. Solomon did return, however. He brought the ring himself and stayed to talk with Berenice, for the girl charmed him. She was so free from worldly motive, so ignorant of fashionable life, so remarkably of the aristocratic class with it all. And her ability betrayed itself in pertinent lucidity of mind, thought meandering strangely in by paths of knowledge gleaned from Lane's books, now and again emitting a shaft of reasoning that staggered her companion. The unexpectedness of the girl's point of view never failed to arrest attention and at times her amazing resolutions carried conviction.

After Paul had grown to know Berenice inti-

mately, dropping in often for an hour's conversation in the afternoon, when she was likely to be alone, he found that to ask and listen without comment was her manner, so she forced him to talk, to revisit for her benefit the scenes of his extensive travel; to describe people and places, rare and beautiful things of art, majestic creations of dead centuries, the monuments of the greatness of man, and the monuments of Nature pitiably dwarfing those. Of all the wonders which had attracted his admiration or interest she made him speak, thus feeding her mind from the repletion of his while her adept fingers worked incessantly with frills and furbelows. Time was precious as long as daylight lasted, yet the moment came when the marvel of life and the world fell upon her, the work dropped to her lap unheeded, and the girl sat still transported into a receptive rapture.

Paul lent her books also. "Dull stuff," Gabrielle pronounced them. In fact Gabrielle was not at all pleased with the course of the affair. Although so splendidly the friend in time of need she lacked the finer feelings which present circumstances called for. She wanted Berenice to profit in some material way by this unprecedented stroke of fortune. She could not resist alluding to the visits of so great a friend, and must always refer

to their frequency as a romantic adventure, so that her personalities became a serious offense to the more refined girl.

"I think he might treat you to a new hat or frock anyway," Gabrielle teased, as she watched the process of pinning on a weather beaten brown felt.

"I don't want a new hat," Berenice answered quietly, but it was worse than useless to protest; the chorus girl would not be diverted from her now favorite theme.

"Think of the millions the man has! He must be a mean one — he's never given you a single thing, has he, Chit?"

"Books," she suggested.

"Shucks! A lot of old things he don't want. I looked at them. Every single one has got his name stuck in the front with that picture print."

"But he only lent them to me."

"Lent them! Well I never! Talk about a tight-wad!"

Berenice smiled. No use to explain to Gabrielle how much more it is to have first editions intrusted to one's care than to own a library. Nor could she even explain to herself why she was glad Paul did not offer to buy things for her. The girl had no conventional code to judge from, yet

she felt anything of that sort would have been a cloud over their friendship. In giving her equality, the supreme gift, he unwittingly returned to the stripped soul its self-respect, and she appreciated this, being very humble in his presence, but enjoying a certain pride since she kept her independence.

The relationship Berenice held with Paul was quite different from knowing Robert Lane even in those early days before he loved her. To Robert she had been a child; from the first he had supplied all her needs, and living under the same roof the intimacies of daily life surrounded them. Now circumstances and Mr. Solomon created another atmosphere. The situation presented to the unsocial woman unique, delightful characteristics. The coming and going, the expectation of his arrival, the moment of adieu, when personality went just so far in friendly courtesy, and never a shade further.

Berenice not knowing why or how Paul's attitude pleased her accepted it as exactly right, a perfect relationship; and fought to keep it sacred from the girls' intrusions, and from the man's increasing kindliness. Now she understood Miss Hearst's confidence; the desire to keep the good just as it was; the woman of it, easily and com-

letely satisfied, too unambitious for progress, too earful of change. So Berenice, happy in the ompanionship, would not have had it otherwise or worlds. Thrusting from her mind all Garielle said, she forgot Paul was a rich man and hought of him only as her friend, and did not ealize their advance in friendship.

The year slipped by till heavenly airs began to raft themselves about, birds sang spring into full oliage, and the city captives sighed for open ountry. One Sunday, when all nature seemed ntoxicated by the rush of sap in her veins, and he windows were flung wide to catch the breeze resh laden from the ravishment of growing hings, Mr. Solomon first justified Gabrielle's xpectations.

"It's something like!" the critic announced as he five made themselves comfortable amid the uff cushions of his French car.

"Where to, Miss?" questioned the genial Irish river, reserving the thought — "Four women nd a baby! A new departure for the master!"

"Where to girls?" Berenice reiterated with n excited laugh, holding Ally very tight.

Oh, anywhere! Into the country — off to he sea! As long as they were bowled away from he noise and dust of the city, what did it mat-

ter? They were not informed about the roads, so the man at the wheel, with his broad, good-humored face, his huge hands, and bulging leather-ensconced calves, drove all day like the wind whither he listed, enjoying the freedom also, and brought them back in the late afternoon, tired and happy, filled with the wine of pure air, ready to eat and sleep.

It was when returning from one of these glorious days, as the heavy car with its regular, soft, panting breath slid down Riverside, that Berenice saw Robert Lane. Since leaving the studio she had avoided going to any of their old haunts, telling herself she could not bear to go alone, and fearing to meet him. But as they glided down the wide drive in the safety of quick motion, she let her eyes single out their favorite places, thinking of the hours they had spent together — and all at once there was the reality of her dream!

He was sitting alone on a bench where they had often sat, with bowed head apparently lost in sad thought. She saw him, but he did not see her. She wanted him to look, to see her — she wanted it passionately, and just as they passed he glanced up. For one second their eyes met, and the scene flashed by. She had looked directly into Robert's face, but she could not be sure that

he had seen her, that he had known. And she had neither strength nor inclination to turn her head. The man and the bench were gone, the park was gone, the houses, the river, the tangible world. Only one thing remained in her consciousness, — the instant of his glance, and the upsetting force of it; the tremendous surging of blood all into her heart at once and out again. How had he such power over her now? She would not have believed it possible! Time was simply blotted out like figures from a wiped slate, and all that had transpired in time. The whole of the intervening life, its purpose, its development was banished. Paul and his friendship were forgotten. She was utterly transferred to the old things, the surroundings, the emotion, the man — for she was his. Stupendous, unalterable, conclusive argument proving its fact; the instinctively maternal woman belongs to the man who has made her his own. His will not hers is the pivot of their operation; she has no longer self for she has given, and the magnitude of a woman's giving does not fall short of herself.

It was all too vivid. Berenice remembered with fresh grief his bowed head, and the appearance of oppressive sorrow. She wanted to weep. She wanted to stop the car and run to him; to put

her hands in his and look deep, deep into his eyes; to lay her two hands on the sides of his face as he loved her to do. Moved with pity for his stricken detachment love overwhelmed her, and from the yearning of her own sorrow, the girl began to think; began to wonder how much Robert missed her, if he thought of her, what he had discovered about the disappearance, and if he knew? The man's side of it all, his loss, dismay, sorrow, presented itself for the first time, and she was appalled at the enormity of her self-occupation, and attitude of martyrdom.

Terrorized by the shock of discovery, and weakened by her long illness Berenice had not stopped to consider the situation. She had acted on impulse, and she began to wonder if she had been quite fair to Robert in leaving; if she might not have acted more kindly.— At least she might have sent him word — possibly he did not even know the child was dead. Could she send him the news now? Ah, if she might only have taken his hands there in the dusk, by that intimacy of touch more than by words expressing her love and her despair, and so have told him all, and then slipped away before he caught her to himself — for he was married! Here fancy pulled up always at a dead stop, in the pain of the deception and the hope-

lessness of their position. Now that she had seen Robert and realized the power of his love, she was more than ever afraid of the consequences of a meeting.

All evening the girl was silent over the recollection, and in dreams that night felt again the pity of the deserted figure alone in their favorite haunt. For days she stitched and pondered seeking to divide kindness from unkindness, to discern right from wrong, to make the way easier without courting danger by exposing her desirous heart to Robert's love. She longed to tell her troubles to Paul feeling he could help her in this perplexity but loyalty put that out of the question. Fearing if she spoke at all she might let Robert's identity slip out, she hid these vital things in her heart and confided the worry of ways and means to her friend.

Therein lay another problem. Since Anna Belle's departure the community had been one short and now Miss Hearst had graduated from general factotum to buyer and would be away more than half the time. Kate had engaged to go to the country with a patient, and Gabrielle was invited to join another co-operative union in a sea beach cottage, a splendid arrangement for her long vacation. It was decided therefore to

abandon the flat. And Berenice was at a loss for provision.

"I'm glad," Paul said quietly when she had told him all this trouble.

"Mr. Solomon!" She looked at him in astonishment. Was he not listening? Had he failed to understand it was a great dilemma for her?

"I do not want to be unsympathetic, but I am glad. I have been waiting for this. Miss Berenice, may I speak plainly?"

"Please do, say anything that is in your mind." But she waited apprehensively.

"I have wanted to talk about it for a long time, but the occasion had not come. This is not the life for you — it is not your world. I do not want to say anything against your friends; they seem to be good hearted, generous girls, and are hard workers which commands respect; but they are not your — environment, your kind.— Have you not felt it sometimes — Don't you find them — noisy?"

Berenice coloured remembering the more than free remarks showered on her about Paul himself, but she looked straight into his face saying, "They have been kind to me." There was a note of challenge in her voice, the pride and heat of

one who champions, and Paul answered that as much as her words.

"I would not ask you to give up your friends after their faithfulness, so I waited. And I am not asking you to leave them now. They are arranging to go their several ways. Does it not make a difference? Are they not separating from you?"

"Yes, I suppose so — but — "

"I want you to step out of this life altogether; to leave it behind; to live, Miss Berenice, as — as — I am sure your parents lived."

"Do you really think I had parents!" They laughed together at her absurdity, but she defended herself. "I mean nice ones like you and — other people." She was thinking of Robert Lane and the new life which had come so suddenly, yet so naturally to her on entering his studio.

"I am quite sure of it, and see you fearfully out of place here. You were not born for these associations, you belong to another world."

Berenice wondered how he knew, for they had never spoken of the studio, and she had nothing to tell of her childhood but the convent, her one memory.

"I want you to give up all this," he said, lean-

ing over and taking between his fingers the flimsy silk on which she had been working.

"But I can't!" the girl gasped. "I must sew! I must live somewhere!" And the involuntary turn of the speech more than anything else in the little home, opened to Paul Solomon the vista of toilsome days. "I must sew — I must live!" Already her idea of life was involved in the thought of endless labour. Not the tonic of congenial occupation but ceaseless, grinding, dull monotony, while the glorious opportunity of mankind was worn threadbare. And there were thousands in the same position; hundreds of thousands to whom work spelt existence.

Paul answered the cry of necessity with the quiet obstinacy of a man securely master of his fate, and arbiter of the destinies of many human beings. "You must not sew, for I want you to live. Do you like this work?"

Berenice thought a moment. "I don't dislike it, and I have to do these things — there is nothing else."

During the months intervening since the discovery of Zia's ring and the first visit to the flat, Mr. Solomon had formed and executed a plan which would at least remove this one fine woman from the drudgery of humdrum life, and give

her the opportunity of doing and enjoying. It was not a gift. Paul looked on the settlement of his brother's affairs as a restitution of rights. He had already proved the boy's death, but there were scenes, and many of them, in the wild years of his life beyond proving, or the executor's desire to investigate. As a sort of burnt offering in expiation for these, and the atonement of a self-indulgent and capricious lust, he divided the remains of Zia's fortune, settling the bulk on Berenice — his brother's last friend.

Thinking of this he answered, "We might find something else — something prettier, easier, something that would not leave marks." And as he spoke he took her hand in his looking at the roughened, needle-pricked finger tips.

"Oh, I did not think you noticed!" she cried, drawing her hands quickly away and burying them deep in the folds of the billowy dancing skirt.

"There is no need to be ashamed of marks which show you are a brave, clever girl. They are honorable scars — but I think we can manage to do without them." There was grave apology in Paul's tone, then he continued speaking more lightly. "What would you do, Miss Berenice, if you had money?"

"I won't ever have any."

"Yes, but if you had. What is your idea of life? What would you do?"

She smiled, thinking he talked to relieve her confusion; and ready to meet the pleasantry half way. "Wouldn't it depend on how much the fairy godmother gave me? A lot, do you mean? — A thousand dollars. I would spend it, oh, in ever so many ways.— What one could buy with a thousand dollars!" She spoke of it as an inexhaustible sum. Paul smiled.

"I mean more than that, many thousands, enough to live on without working."

Berenice drew her brows together in a mockery of deep thought, then inspiration flashed its light, the pretense became reality, enthusiasm kindled the grey eyes. "If it were a lot of money, a great, great deal, I would build a home for bambinos!"

"Little Pilgrim!" The man cried, delighted by her eagerness. But the girl took up her work again, shaking her head. "I shall never finish my pilgrimage. I know now they would not want the children at Santa Maria, although there is plenty of room in the convent and all the holy sisters to take care of them. What a selfish life it is there! — Would it take a tremendous amount of money to build a home?"

"Yes, a good bit. I am afraid it would take much more than you have."

"But I haven't any!" she laughed. "Did you forget it was a game, that we were only pretending?"

"No, I didn't forget. I was not pretending. It is quite true. There was money left with me belonging to my brother, Miss Berenice, and there is no one to whom it should go. It is yours — Zia gives it to you."

With suspended needle she gazed at Paul, still doubtful of his serious intention, and at last questioned. "How can it be mine? How can he give it to me — now?"

"Perhaps you do not understand these things, but believe me it is genuine. The money is yours. He invested in shares and bonds and I have authority to transfer them to your name — but we must find out first what it is. We must find a name for you, Berenice."

"I do not in the least understand — am I rich, then?"

"It will not make you rich, little woman; but — you will be able to live differently."

"I do not want to live differently.— Yes, I do," she corrected. "But I want the other more. I promised to look after the little children.

Wouldn't there be enough to build a very little home for very little bambinos? — I could sew too — "

"No more sewing." Paul's voice was firm.

The girl sat a long time in thought and at last turned to him with triumph. "If I cannot build a home I will make one. I will go away and live in the country and the children will live with me. There is Ally to be taken care of anyway. Oh, it will be glorious!" she cried, clasping her hands. "We will have a garden and trees, and beautiful green grass, and live things about the place — but we will not have any wall, only an open fence so that all the poor people outside can look through and see the flowers, and the children will learn there is a world out there, a great, beautiful, wonderful world for them to enjoy when they are bigger. And we will have dogs and birds — I am so anxious to start. Do you know of any house in the country?"

Paul smiled at her enthusiasm. He liked the idea for the summer. It seemed a good beginning. "I think I know just the place for you. It is the original house on my property at La Haut, up in the mountains — would you like that?"

"I'd love it! Splendid! I am so anxious to commence!"

"We will go up there and look at it next week, if you like."

"You must let me pay rent," the girl interposed quickly. "How much will it cost?"

Paul shook his head. "You are getting positively shrewd! I am sure I don't know what it is worth, but I will ask the agent to look it up, and we will have the place put in order."

"Right away? Let us begin at once!" She pushed the theater costume from her with a frankness she would not have indulged earlier and laughing confessed, "After all — I do not like sewing."

He joined in the laugh, touched at the same time by the reality of her past efforts, and echoed her words. "Right away. We will make a holiday of it and motor out. I am as anxious to see you in the country away from the heat as you are to go there."

The girl all at once grew silent, his speech suddenly projected on memory, Robert and her last country visit. Paul was surprised. Her silence set him thinking, and he attributed it to propriety. These working girls, exposed to the under side of life, naturally had to be on the defensive, and she was right. So, admiring her, he classified the change of mood and explained. "You will not

be alone, we will find some one to go and live in the wilds with you, and I may be at my place sometimes for the week-ends — I am not sure. Does that make a difference? You trust me, do you not?"

"Oh, it is not that!" Berenice cried in distress. "You have been so good to me, you make me so happy! Please believe I am ready to trust you, Mr. Solomon. I shall love to see you in the mountains. It was not that — I — it was —"

"You were quite right. There has been no one to look after you, but we are going to make some changes. We will find a companion for you in the hills, and a name — an heiress must have a name," he teased. "If there is none for you in the Convent, we will get a dictionary and hunt one up."

She laughed, but was not satisfied. She felt he had misunderstood her hesitation, and wanted him to know it was not he who had caused it. At the door she gave him both her hands in good-bye, saying:

"You do not think I meant it — so? You must know I trust you. There will never be anybody in all the world I will trust more than I trust you." It was shyly spoken, the sincerity of her whole tender heart bent to remove the false impression, and Paul, delighted with this fresh reve-

lation of the woman, whose faith was sweet to him as her simplicity, gravely raised her hands to his lips.

Berenice drew them away quickly, and seeing her embarassment he asked: "Is it not an Italian custom? I did not think you would mind.— Is it all right? Am I forgiven?"

She nodded acquiescence and farewell, but he left her more perturbed than she had cared to show. He had kissed her; her hands only to be sure, but still she felt distressed, for the thought that first thrust itself forward was of Robert. With the vision of his wife's face in her mind, Berenice did not want her lover to kiss her, but she felt no one else should do so. Then she thought of her friendship with Paul, and lost herself in mixed emotions while a wildly beating heart echoed Miss Hearst's cry, "The present always." His action amazed and alarmed her; the woman feared and was pleased and regretted. She wanted Paul, her friend and companion to remain only that, surely it was enough. All her fine nature yearned toward the ideal. She wanted to be sure of Paul her friend, and that he should incarnate perfection, and, woman-like, feeling a triumph in the knowledge he had cared to kiss her, was confused and glad in the face of disappointment.

XVII

HEART-PAIN

The house in which Berenice established herself was on a lower level than that part of the estate where Mr. Solomon had built, and had a broad sweep of turf around three sides of it, with an old-fashioned, flower bordered walk leading to the road. From the gate a hedge of blossoming shrubs extended in either direction while an orchard, the trees of which were gnarled and aged in keeping with the whole, spread its pink and white canopy between the valley and the garden. Wine like mountain air and the splendid view, ever changing with the moods of nature, added intoxication to the beauty of the place. Berenice was transported with joy from the moment she saw it, feeling no other setting could have been so perfect for her undertaking. The old mansion with its garden and its trees breathed home, and at the end of a week the family seemed to have become one with the blessed growing things about them.

For the present the household consisted of herself and Ally, and a middle-aged widow with two children. The latter, seeking only a living where she could have her girl and boy at her side, was delighted to become house-keeping companion to the enterprise. Paul feared Berenice would be lonely in the hills with only Mrs. Roberts for company. He insisted on a well stocked library, and kept the exile, as he expressed it, as much as possible in touch with the world and metropolitan interests by letters, the latest publications, and what ever came into his mind as likely to entertain her. But no cries or lamentations for the lost excitements of city life came from his new tenant. The girl laughed when he sent her a phonograph, and suggested a resident tutor.

"I am happy," she cried, "I need nothing!" And she meant it. At that time she could not have thought of a single material thing that would have increased her joy.

At last Berenice felt at home. Here she had the surroundings of her childhood, all that had been good, and sweet, and wholesome, and attractive at Santa Maria, and, added to this, the doing of real things, the touch of responsibility, the importance of service — glorious fullness of life! She knew herself essential to those about her, and

in turn became dependent on them, giving affection freely and calling on theirs; in all finding greater happiness than she had imagined possible. The tranquility and peace of the life soothed her yearning heart. In the thousand little services the children demanded daily, she forgot the pain of memory; she learned to think of Robert without reproach, of the studio life as a dream exquisite in its short duration, and of that sharp awakening without bitterness. Her soul was bathed and comforted in this pure and simple environment and drank in peace. As the days strung themselves one by one on the golden thread of time, something of the grandeur, the breadth and strength of the mountains entered into her; the empty chambers of her nature, that had lain vacant and starved, now filled with the everlasting wonder of creation Feeding on beauty she grew and developed soul and body into a magnificent humanity fitted in turn to become a tower of strength to weaker beings. So the early summer passed without noticeable event.

A long, hot afternoon had worn away to cool repose, and Berenice with a book under her arm, climbed to her favorite spot, a semi-circular stone seat at the end of a broad grass walk leading directly from the library of the big house. Here

she commanded a wide view of the valley and the hills beyond, and the charm of the place soon rivaled the interest of her book. She sat in contemplation till startled by hearing Mr. Solomon's voice, speaking authoritatively, just behind. She did not know Paul had come up, and turned in greeting.

He was talking to a youth who had been caught trespassing in the woods, and asked the most natural question under the circumstances,

"What is your name?"

"Alex, sir."

There was a pause. Paul repeated his inquiry. Then the boy looked up defiantly. "I ain't got no other!" He said, adding in a sullen voice. "It's not my fault."

Something in the flush on the lad's face stabbed Berenice. She did not hear the gardener's charge, nor the owner's reply as the three moved off toward the house. A sudden hot resentment for herself and her child surged through her. Even here in the beautiful country a young thing could feel that shame. For an instant she was glad the babe had died. Forgetful of the boy and his troubles her mind and spirit wrestled with its own problem. Through the silence dim echoes of the past smote her. Would it always be so? Amid

the peace and harmony of life would some trick of circumstances ever rise jarring the past into reality? Robert and the wrong he had done them poisoned the moment, and making all more bitter came the heart-sick longing for the man she loved. Then her mood softened. Ashamed and penitent, determined to exorcise rebellion, thinking of the bounty of her lot she awaited Paul's return. The emotion was past but very soon the idea springing from it found expression.

"Did you notice how ashamed that boy looked because he could only give you one name?"

"Poor chap, probably he has been made a butt all his life. They don't forget such accidents in rural communities."

"I was sorry for him. I think I understood." Seeing in his wistful look that she distressed her friend, Berenice roused herself to a more cheerful vein. "Don't you think it would be nice if we didn't have any names and could call people just as they felt at the time, or let events decide it as the Indians do?"

"But how would we know, what shall I call you now for instance?"

"Ah, it would need a larger spiritual vision." The woman laughed. "The task of finding a permanent name is no sinecue. I was reading

Cellini the other day and I tried every one I came across — Serristorri, Quistello, d'Anterigoli, but they all seemed absurd for me. I think I will remain a mountain spirit and have only one." She added more seriously. "For this is the real life in the heart of nature; I am sure it is only here one can find lasting happiness."

"Do you ponder all these things when I am not here and you can sit and gaze over the mountains to your heart's content."

"My heart's content! You know I like it best when you are here."

For a time Paul remained silent looking toward the purple hills in sun-bathed distance, and down on the dappled valley far below, where the softness of the atmosphere blended into one mellow light the harvest's yellow gold. When he spoke it was gravely.

"Berenice, in all your thinking have you ever considered returning to the convent — as a nun?"

"No. Why should I? What made you ask?"

"Do you never think about it, about your vows? Have you weighed and decided the question? Remembering you intended to return when you started on your pilgrimage, I wondered what you thought about it now?"

The girl looked at him in doubt. "I could not

live that life of idleness now. You do not want me to go back? You do not think I should, do you?"

"It is not what I think Berenice. You know I am not — I do not understand your church. Without the training I could not judge; the question would be simple to me. But I want to know how you have decided as a Catholic; surely it is something to consider.— I want you to be happy."

"I am happy," she replied, very softly.

"Yes, now. But I want you to be able to be happy always. This must be a question of conscience to you. Are you sure your conscience is not troubled?" Paul took her hand tenderly in his. "I want to help you. Do not put this thing out of your mind because it is difficult, it is always better to face a difficulty. None of us can be happy with an uneasy conscience — and I have fancied, sometimes, that you were sad."

"I am sad, at times," she admitted. "But it is not that — I do not think about the convent. I have finished thinking about it. I have broken the vows."

"Tell me how you have thought of it."

The woman spoke slowly, choosing her words. "When I made those vows I was quite ignorant, I knew nothing but the cloister, and the cloister

life, I knew nothing about the world. And they did not instruct me. They gave me no choice really, no choice at all. The Mother Superior said, "You are happy in the convent, Berenice, you should vow yourself to God and stay with us;" and Father Nicolo, who was kind and good to me, said, "Stay with us always, little daughter, it will be pleasing to God."

"You had no choice. But are you willing to give it all up finally? I want to be sure."

"Now I have seen real things, the world and life as it is, I am not sure the cloister of Santa Maria pleases God.— Selfish and useless is it blessed, can it be so, endless fasting and prayer?"

"There are good women in the cloister praying."

"And there are better women outside working. In all the convent there is none more kind than Mrs. Roberts, no one who works for others as Miss Hearst does." Berenice was silent thinking of the six hungry orphans who had eaten up the little house on the hill. She sat with her chin in her hand lost in thought. Suddenly her voice broke out in fierce protest. "They did not give me a chance. They were not fair with me! How could I give up life when I did not know life?

Such vows are nothing but a blind repetition of a form of words!"

Her vehemence lifted a weight from Paul's mind, setting it free of the doubt which had held him back, and he answered quickly:

"You do not need to convince me. It is as I would have reasoned, but I was not sure you could feel it — I feared one of your faith — "

"What is my faith?" she cried softly, stretching her hands to the distant hills. "Is not God here. I accept His revelation."

In silence, delighted by the beauty of her radiant fact, Paul watched till she turned again, asking, "Are you satisfied?"

"Yes. And I am glad we have spoken about it. I know now you are free from that bondage, — and you know why I questioned. I wanted you to think for yourself, to reach the point of freedom uninfluenced. Now I am no longer afraid for you; and you will not be afraid even of the priests. Could they — could Father Nicolo persuade you to go back?"

"No, I shall never go back. I have given myself voluntarily to the children of the world, and I will stay with them. There is no need for me in the convent. I love life. I have broken all

the vows and at the best it could be but a bit of patchwork."

"Then you shall stay with me here, for there is no necessity to return. Until last March you were a ward of the order, but now it is choice. You have passed the provisional majority and are free."

"How do you know! What has happened?"

"I have heard from Santa Maria. I have been busy with the law trying to find a name for you, while you were purloining from Benvenuto."

"You have heard from Santa Maria! — You have heard about my parents! Have I a name? Who am I?"

He shook his head at the first question, yet smiled, for he was very happy. "It is hard to say.— I do not know all — but your father was a prince."

The girl's eyes sparkled and laughed with him as she threw her head up, crying, "I always knew the world was made for me!" The gesture showed that same spirit of hauteur which had sprung naturally to answer Helen's insult long before, now playfully assumed, and grand in freedom it was inimitable.

"Berenice! It must be!" Paul cried in admiration and wonder.

"My father a prince — the wicked prince. Was my mother a fairy? Go on, do go on!" she urged.

"Yes, a dancing fairy adored from Lisbon to St. Petersburgh, from London to the Levant.— She has been dead many years. And your father I believe to have been a very great man, though I was not told so."

"I think he must have been a very bad man. Was he Italian?"

"No, you are half English, half Russian — but you must not be a barbarian. You must not be a harsh judge of others; there may have been circumstances which you would not understand."

"I — that is what I meant. He should not have left his child to strangers."

"It is not an easy matter to be great. It often means not doing what one wishes most, giving up the dearest things of life possibly. And your father may not have been to blame. As least he cared for you. He provided for you."

"In the convent."

"And otherwise. He left you money."

"Money, when I have no name!"

"Do not let us trouble any more about that."

His fingers closed over hers, but in a different manner. The action was a taking possession.

Beneath the pressure of his hand Berenice felt hers grow cold as ice.— If only she had spoken to spare him this! And at the moment she could not speak, could not withhold the inevitable; something within her seemed to be dying, as if the little song bird of her emotional joy, had burst his poor quivering throat over an agonized note. Though Paul's next words laid waste their friendship, and banished the gladness of the present, it seemed she must wait for them. They were simple, direct as the man's nature.

"I love you, will you be my wife? Will you take my name?"

She saw a great gulf fixed between them, a fathomless gulf embracing all time, stretching from eternity to eternity. The past and the future sank into it and were annihilated. The gulf became her own heart and it was bottomless, filled with sorrow, silent in its secret depths, troubled for her friend.

"Berenice, have you nothing to say to me?"

Still she was speechless and he continued. "I do not mean to hurry you — this must not be a blind choice. But my heart longs for you. I have wanted you for months, and I have kept my promise, little one, I have not wearied you with importunity. Can you not care for me? I have given

you all my love. It is yours now and forever." He raised his eyes to seek her dear face and saw the tears running down unchecked from under the closed eyelids, while a quiver of suffering around the mouth wrung his heart.

"Child, child, don't! — I see I have been mistaken. I will say no more — only don't cry so. Forget that I have grieved you. Forget my hope. I am too old a man for you, my child.— Let us forget it."

"It isn't that. Not that," she sobbed. "I — it cannot be. I thought — you must feel it, must know. I have wanted to tell you."

"Tell me, tell me. And we will set the trouble right. In my heart I only wish to make you happy." He drew her to him tenderly as he spoke, but she only hung her head, hiding her face, and between the catches of her breath she whispered.

"I said I had broken — all the vows — oh, don't you understand."

The sense of it shocked Paul to the innermost part of his being, yet his hand never ceased from stroking her hair. He would not let her know how great his pain. Neither of them moved till the shadows paled from slanting on the broad walk. Then Berenice told her story, very simply

and without reserve, as she had told the first story, as she could tell anything to Paul.

"Poor little woman," he said tenderly. "Poor child, how much you have suffered." And silence fell again. The man was thinking of her last words.

"I was so happy. I loved my baby and I loved him. He is the father of my child. He is my husband — the same to me. I could not marry anybody else." In the voice protest and beseeching question mixed strangely, so that Paul could not find it in his heart to contradict the thought. And he realized that to her it was the same. The woman's attitude was instinct with morality — for her there could be no other man in this relationship than the man she loved, the first man who had made her his own. Again he seemed to hear that fierce defensive cry: "They were not fair with me. I did not know!" Was not the child's second mistake almost a repetition of the first? Could not every argument used against the Church be as fitly turned against the man? Had not fate let a flaming soul loose into life without preparation, and taken advantage of her on every hand; through her faith, through her love, and through natural instinct?

Thus Paul justified Berenice in his mind while

suffering under the first bitterness of the disappointment her confession meant to him. He did not love her less, if anything she was more dear. Her need being greater his affection grew to meet the need, and over and over again he asked himself: "How many women would have told me?" For with all personal humility Paul Solomon was well aware that he had much to offer, and from his knowledge of the world's standards, ambitions and deceits he marveled anew, reverencing and loving this pure heart. And his affection grew broad and deep as he saw her ideality, her simplicity, her truth lofty and unequivocal.

After a time Berenice broke in upon his thought with a pathetic aloofness in her voice. "Do you think my father deceived my mother so?"

"Do not let us judge them, little one."

"I wonder."

To rouse her from this sad vein he continued the story of his discoveries. "Your father loved you, Berenice, and provided for you — amply. I have not told you all yet. There is money waiting for you. It has been waiting all these years. — That is why the Church hoped to find and reclaim you."

"Then it must be a great deal. How much is it?"

He named the sum. "It is a lot, Berenice, You are rich."

The girl sprang to her feet and throwing her arms open cried aloud in a transport of joy. "I can do it! I can, I can! I will fulfill my promise. I will build a home for the little children of the world."

So she stood gloriously transfigured in the sunset, and when her voice had died away among the echoes, threw herself at Paul's feet pleading. "You will not go away. You will not leave me alone. Help me.—Tell me how to work—I need you so!"

Raising her gently he took both her hands in his. "Let us remain together, Berenice. Let everything remain as it was. If you give this money I will put as much more to it, and we will build the home. We will work together."

"And we will please God more, I think, than they please Him at Santa Maria."

Her reply was full of a grand purpose in which self was utterly forgotten. The love of life and the love of her kind shone in her eyes and throbbed in her voice, like the strong tide of a mighty river sweeping them both along into a larger life.

XVIII

HEALING

Berenice was so seriously intent upon the building of the home that Paul took it up at once, and the planning of the scheme fully occupied her time. With reading and writing, collecting data and information, and visting charitable institutions this one object soon began to encroach on every other purpose of life. The woman was amazed to find how much study and what a mass of correspondence grew out of their search for facts. They must consider the idea from every side, contrive for every necessity, organize and construct it in every detail before a sod was turned. In the multiplicity of these affairs life lost for the girl much the delightful aspect of a dream that it had worn during the last summer. Her entire faculties were concentrated on the enterprise in hand, and she worked more tirelessly than many a city clerk at his daily grind.

Berenice had dreamed of a great building in the cloister style, but the man of the world, having

seen much money wasted in uneffective charity, decreed otherwise, and showed her the project in a new and splendidly comprehensive light.

"You cannot make a home so," he said, sweeping aside with a gesture the piled statistics and photographs of a formidable institution. "You can never make a home for the many, you can only supply the way and the means. We may build the houses one by one but only the mother who is in them can make the home. Do not nullify your individual effort by reaching out to foster an entire world. We must be contented to work within the radius of human influence. The essential thing in a home is not the roof but the heart. Let us begin with a half a dozen houses such as this, build them wide and low, keep the children near the Universal Mother, teach them to love the soil.

And her mind unfolding to his theory she acquiesced. "You are right, my scheme was too vast."

Through the winter Paul was much at La Haut, and they grew into a heart to heart intimacy which they had not known before. When he talked to her the girl felt she hung upon the entrance to another existence. This grave quiet man held a secret, he had a grasp upon life that she would fain have understood and followed. Paul in the city had been a delight, but Paul in the country

was a continual wonder. He seemed to move closely in harmony with Nature, to think in harmony with her, to draw upon some mysterious source for a continual, refreshing happiness.

Berenice felt his importance to her as she had never counted any other human interest, realizing there was strength in it beyond the finite. She was conscious of something she should receive from him, an intangible gift, a pass word to a larger life, a message of tremendous importance. She lived upon his words, and pondered them in his absence, and would have given much to open her heart, pouring out its longing and love-hunger. Something held her back. Not only natural diffidence in recalling a subject that must be so painful to them both, but emotion like a high wall blocked her path. Time and again when he had almost surmounted it, revulsion came. She could not give her confidence fully, and all the while she felt the need of hearing him put into words that which she saw in his kind sympathetic glance and felt in his attitude toward her.

Once, in the early twilight of a winter afternoon, Paul had invited her trust, smiling down on her as she sat in a low chair, a comprehensive smile like a beatitude. Berenice thought that look must lift the weight of sorrow off the shoulders of

the weary and careworn throughout the world if only he could have smiled on them all. Then he came nearer and laid his hand on the back of her chair, and bending to the silent trouble of her face, whispered.

"Do not be fearful, I am sure the man you love is great and good."

How did he know? Why had he spoken? Her heart trembled to the first word of the message, but she was dismayed at the reading of her thoughts, and did not speak. Again the old obstacle intervened and opportunity passed unclaimed.

It was not until the first flush of spring that the message came fully. They had gone up to a secluded place under a pine tree, which rose from a narrow neck of rock and leaning westward spread its branches over the ravine below. In the early afternoon the sun beat full upon the ledge with a summer heat, and they basked like lizards in the golden glow.

The girl found her heart heavy for Paul was going away on one of his long journeys, and she knew how sorely he would be missed. The wander-lust has seized him. He was gay in anticipation of release from business, and his gaiety sent a pang through her heart.

"You are thoughtful. Pan pipes, little woman, but you do not dance?"

The loafer turned on his side and looked enquiringly up.

At the remembrance of his near departure the need of hearing the unmistakable words returned. She glanced away and in the motion he seemed to catch the yearning of her mood. Perhaps he also felt the great desire to bridge that little span between their souls. Some intangible unity subject to the waves of emotion, hovered over and hung quivering about them. The woman hardly dared to breathe lest she dispel the harmony, and then he spoke, his voice reaching a tenderness unbelievable even for him.

"I have been thinking of that little story you told me about your New England friend; of her poor, plain face illuminated by the halo of an unforgotten sunset. The human desire, the thought of a mate, a home and children could make her beautiful even in retrospect. What would it have been if she had allowed love to live — instead of duty."

Berenice knew now it was her own attitude that kept them from perfect confidence. Before he could speak freely she must lay her heart open to him.

Patiently, sadly, his voice went on. "She gave up life, the real life to her creed, and there has been nothing but empty years for both of them. She was mistaken about values. It is possible for the finest soul and the grandest intention to fall into the most fatal mistake." Presently he added, "Do not you make one who loves you pay that awful price."

His own loneliness stared through the words though he spoke of a woman and for another man.

A sob caught in the girl's throat. Grief for the waste of it, the complications; the lives beggared through a miserable sense of duty and a flame of pride surged over her. And then she began to see her own action in another light. She recalled Robert as she had left him, long before, standing afar off in the shadows, searching everywhere. Had she not denied him from duty and pride?

The thought was like a promise of new life, her soul like a prison cell thrown broadly open to the heavenly light and air. So terrible were the beauty and the glory and the freedom her spirit turned away in fear.

"What must I do. What must I do?" she cried, stretching her hands to Paul in uncertainty. "I love the man and I left him because he had — a wife. Robert deceived me — but I love him.

Oh, tell me, this message you have carried to my heart, is it right! Is it true?"

"What does Nature teach?" he asked gently. And Berenice sitting quite still, watching the white clouds chase one another across the blue vault at their feet, was filled with a sublime peace. After a time he took her hand and began to talk.

"You were not meant for the little world of little people and their little ideas. I knew that when first I saw you; when I heard the story of your pilgrimage. A grand primitive force was put into you at birth that is bound to work its way out, only you had to hear the voice of Nature, to learn to draw on her strength till your own soul grew greater than the pettiness of man-law; to feel the magnificence and power of independent thought.

"You are the full type of glorious humanity. You have beauty of body, beauty of mind, beauty of soul; and now you have freedom of all these. And you have the great human qualities, love of life and love of your own kind. You are the instinctive mother and can only be happy with the man who is strong enough and fine enough to win your love. Your joy lies in him and his in you. Do not deny him because of the limitation of other minds. The same way is not for all.— Was

it convention, or duty, or pride or fear that drove you from him?"

Ah, the message had its sting. There is a penalty for redemption.

"You were brave, but you considered self only, you acted for self. You were all wrong. And the price you paid was the life of his child." She cowered under the blow, but he did not spare her. "At first you resented, then you forgave — have you no need to be forgiven?"

Her need. The very words! His voice rolled out into the fiery light of the brilliant day, strong and deep vibrating from the heart of life of which he spoke. To Berenice it seemed the elements themselves combined sending the message to her questioning, delighted soul. And out of the valley there rose the song of a bird calling to his mate. It hung on one clear, liquid note, melting and seductive. The two human beings heard and understood, and Berenice threw herself on her face and wept passionately.

"How did you know? How did you know?" she cried. "Are you God?"

"I have learned the lesson that the mountains were to teach you, and I wanted to help you learn it," he said simply. "So often you have been just there, and have turned back to the things of this

life. I could not bear to leave you sad, little one, and I felt at last I must read the message to you — before I went away."

Then he turned and spoke to her very seriously. "Do not be afraid, little woman, of the terrible small things, the little critics of life. Write to your love. Tell him the ice is out of the rivers and the buds bursting on the trees. Tell him all your desire. Rise grandly above the restrictions of smaller souls and smaller minds. For each of us there is a law and yours is the triumphant law of instinct. Be true to yourself; learn to live freely as you have learned to think."

Berenice sat erect. His words were as wine to the trembling spirit; only once she wavered. "Is it right?" The world-learned convention rose to her lips in spite of herself.

"Were you happy, you and he, before his wife came?"

"Perfectly. It was like heaven. We were only two in all the world."

"Then what difference did the woman make? None whatever if she had not existed in your own mind."

"I understand," Berenice assented, realizing that all her care and trouble had been of her own making. Out of her little faith evil had sprung

into being. "I see none of it need have happened if I had been big enough to forgive and endure." Later she added, "I will write to Robert. I will write at once."

XIX

THE SONG OF SONGS

Throughout the journey to town next morning Paul's mind was troubled. He had counseled Berenice on the heights and from the heights we are apt to slip back into spiritual depression.

In the early days of his love and their friendship, had Berenice known it, the man seemingly so sure of himself, so deliberate and compelling, had been tremulous as she before the wondrous realization of a soul ideal. The Creator may have gazed long on the beauty of that form in His own image, before He breathed the breath of life; so Paul had waited, letting time linger, tasting the rapture in anticipation, at last seeking to crystallize with a word the white heart of his dream. And the supreme moment had been pierced by the sword of finality.

Though there was nothing more to receive the lover still gave. He had sent his love out fully and did not want to retrieve the gift. His whole being yearned over the woman longing for her

happiness, combating its own desire, reproving instinct. From the moment of her confession the man set himself to travel that path of self abnegation leading directly to the Heart of Love, where are preserved the rare passions of rare souls which may not be achieved save by fire. The footing is not easy. The limit of understanding not less than the coil of humanity impedes. Paul was stayed between the unselfish wish to help Berenice, and ineffectual efforts of the will to control emotion. Up among the pine trees and the clouds, with spring sweeping the valley, her clarion call in their ears, it had seemed wise and right to urge the putting out of a hand toward the goal or her desire. But from the view of the practical social world, the fabric of mental and moral consciousness which naturally came with a return to city environment, he was plunged into doubt. It might be he had only driven her on to a reawakening and a perpetuation of her grief.

Berenice believed so confidently in Robert's love that it was hard not to believe with her. Yet Helen Lane had been dead for many months, and surely, with modern contrivance, if Robert had sought the girl he could have found her. Paul wondered if he had been quite fair in not telling of the death of Robert's wife. He who wanted her to

soar above petty convention, now found his own faith weighted by time-worn prejudices. Lane ought to have done something to find the mother of his child and make her his own. Such was the motif constantly in the variation of his thoughts. If he still loved why had he not sought the woman out?

Paul was too just to divulge the fact of the wife's death and so impress the other man's shortcoming on Berenice, but he could not shut the doubt out of his own mind. He began to see his friend magnificently on the heights and the one she loved not there to meet her. Hard on the heels of the doubt came a faint hope. Guileless of ulterior motive he had urged Berenice to a meeting, but the outcome of such an interview might mean much to himself. It is possible for a woman to remain forever true to the ideal. What if the ideal be shattered by positive failure — if Robert failed?

His own advantage paled beside the thought of such pain to the woman. Now he became afraid of Lane's failure and wanted some guarantee of her happiness before leaving the country. How much did he know of Robert's real attitude? He believed him a good fellow, but opportunities of studying the recluse were difficult. Swayed be-

tween the satisfaction of seeing Lane and sending him to the mountains, and natural disinclination to meet him, and a fear of the terrible defeat which might be awaiting Berenice, Paul's fancy cycled on the need of the one he loved as the wheels spun over the shining track bearing him far from her simple peace into complexity.

Thus the human spirit wars in the strife of its own mood, more and more deeply mired by argument and evidence, and at last giving up turns to find the problem solved by exterior circumstances. Paul read the old lesson anew on receiving a message from Jasper Nott inviting him to lunch at the house. For the moment he had forgotten Margaret, and she of all persons was the one best able to help him to an understanding of Robert Lane. Almost the first words she uttered carried them right to the threshold of his dilemma.

"Paul, what is all this I read about an orphanage you are going to build in the mountains. I do not like to find first news of my friends in the daily papers. We are just a little hurt that you have not told us."

The opportunity so easily and so quickly come. Careful of another's trust he told her all his own knowledge of Berenice; not only her partnership in the charity, but some of the intimate things he

loved, characteristics that must win the other woman's heart. For now he saw the two friends and wondered why he had not thought of it before, and spoke in glowing words to compass Margaret's interest. She was moved and replied eagerly.

"Do you remember once, long ago, I wrote to you of a little sister in an old Italian convent? Your story reminds me of that young girl's love of children. It is very touching. What is your — what is her name?"

"Berenice." Paul's lips opened to finish for Margaret the idyl of Santa Maria, and her husband's in surprised exclamation of remembrance. But a quick cry arrested both.

"Berenice! Tell me, tell me, what is she like? Has she red hair?"

And hardly waiting for the answer the hostess rose abruptly and left the room. When she returned a subdued excitement marked her words and looks. "I know you are very busy, Paul, but I have just telephoned my cousin, Robert, to come here at once, and I want you to stay and see him. It is important — Will you wait?"

There was a pause, to Paul the subjection of self, and he answered slowly, You have sent for Robert Lane — then you know, Margaret?"

"Do you know?"

"Does he still love her? Is it all right?" The words burst from him without premeditation. And when the champion passionately affirmed their truth, she was dismayed to see her friend walk to the window, and turning his back upon the room let the time pass without either motion or comment. With a sign Jasper left, and later the confidant slipped out to greet Robert and tell him just the bare gladsome news, and stole off to her own apartment haunted by the mingled sorrow and joy of life.

Standing opposite to the man who had so sorely wronged his beloved comrade Paul searched the face intently. Lines of care, premature age, and a deep reserve were graven on it, but the eyes met his steadfastly, and he saw in their depths a sorrow more profound than Berenice had ever known. In answer to that truth the older man gave his hand, with difficulty controlling his voice.

After all there was little to say. A question and a reply. "Where is she? Have you told her everything — that my wife is dead?"

The other shook his head. "She will send for you as she left the convent because she is big enough to dare to live"

But Robert could not wait for any summons.

He must go immediately. And watching the tall figure hasten out, eager to catch the first train, Paul could no longer stay himself with the least doubt of that meeting on the heights. In the quick reaction of self his mind sought relief from entering into sympathy with any expression of surprise or pleasure, and after the briefest possible farewell, he turned from Margaret's door, free to follow the image of his love; agonizing over the bestowal of that future in which he could have no part.

All the morning Berenice had moved about her tasks with the glory of the message thrilling her through and through. There was a letter to write that day, a wonderful letter. She might have written it any hour but for the pleasure of anticipation put it off a little. Not the least trace of Paul's doubt glimpsed anywhere in her mood. Faith was perfect as the poetry of her surroundings; the whole of nature seemed to have awakened with inspiration for her heart. But once written the sending of her summons became imperative.

"Alex," she called, in the early afternoon, to the new boy who had stretched his lazy length on the precious young grass, where the sun might stream full upon him. "I want this letter posted,

and you had better go at once. It is important."

He touched his cap and started up the road where pine and tender birch leaves interwove the shadows. The lilt in his mistress' voice, and the laugh in her eyes, her happy assurance sped the messenger on his way.

Berenice watched her letter out of sight. A fresh charm hung about her as though the woman had fled back into the girl. At last the mind had turned from its too great weight of sad experience and was willing to rest while love learned again to rule. A sense of the completeness of life throbbed in and around her; and she was thinking: "My cry is like the bird's song, we have each poured out the wonder of a single perfect day." Then dismay shot a fear across the spell. "I have called him, I have called him! But what if he does not come?"

In thought the hours that must elapse seemed an eternity.

Eager to execute her orders the boy wound up the steep road lying between the smaller and the larger dwelling of La Haut. Near by the gate where Paul's driveway joined the state road, he heard the rattle of wheels, and a mountain cart swung into view.

"Where be goin'?" called the driver.

Breathless after the climb, Alex waved the letter above his head, and promptly accepted the offered lift. With rustic curiosity they examined the envelope. "Special delivery," the bearer announced with pride.

The old coachman spoke seldom and to the point. "Robert Lane — that's the name of the party as I'm to meet. Better ask if it's for he and you can put the ten cents in your pocket. Get along!"

They had need to brisken the pace for the up train was drawing in as the team wheeled to the platform. A single passenger alighted; a man with heavy shoulders and a kindly face, and the boy was encouraged to ask his question.

Robert started. The handwriting unnerved him. "How did she know?" Then he saw it was stamped for the post and smiled with that rare kindling of the eyes which had caressed the child Berenice on the old roof-garden. She had been sending for him, wanting him. The knowledge gave him more pleasure than the first discovery of her whereabouts had done. It is the homely, little things of life which warm our hearts. In the stupendous fact of the great disclosure all sensation had been lost. It was light after darkness. That had been the feeling in



Robert's mind on the way up. A great light after a dense black night lasting for years. Now with the sight and touch of the paper her hand had held sensation became realization.

He read the letter through twice, the call of love echoing from heart to heart. Beyond a few turns in the road she was awaiting him. O glorious moment! They could not cover the ground quick enough to satisfy his longing, yet at the first gate he dismissed the horses and walked on, seeking to quiet his agitation.

The guide led the way up the flower bordered path. As they neared the house a sound of singing wafted out on the mellow air. The voice was low, but it was her voice, and Robert's soul which had starved in drought opened suddenly to a summer of adoring passion.

"It's herself putting the child to bed," his companion whispered. "She'll not want to be disturbed till he's asleep."

Noiselessly they approached the door and waited listening. The voice poured itself out in dainty, minor cadences to the ears of the wakeful child. For a long time Berenice sang to him and to them, while the changing beauty of the evening and the reflected sunset rolled out and over and died away again. The blue quickly deepened to

purple and faded to rose and violet, and in the soft half tones a lemon colored moon hung above the valley. It was all exquisitely beautiful and pure. The mountain air enveloped them like one perfect musical note, and the voice singing farewell to day and the entrance into dreamland was the sweetest possible rift in the silence. Nature spoke directly to her ever worshipful artist son. The balm flowed into the parched places of Robert's heart, and once he saw the country boy raise his hand and draw the back of it across his eyes.

The singing ceased. A movement came from inside, the sound of a gentle footfall.

"Good night," Alex whispered, and he seemed all at once to melt away into the quiet shadows.

Berenice came out onto the porch. With her hands clasped behind her she gazed up at the moon, and her dear profile was clear cut to Robert from where he stood. Holy, passionate, illuminating joy shone in her face. She remained thus for a while, the perfect harmony of look and mood unbroken by any sign, then the man saw her lips move and his own name floated softly on the still air.

"Ruberto."

"Berenice — I am here! —" the voice broke,

but her arms were around him, her face pressed against his breast.

"You have come," she sobbed. "You have come — I called and you came. I was all wrong —"

"Woman, my woman," was all he could say, but he held her close, close to his heart, and the voices of the night spoke for them uttering marvellous things.









